PRICE SIXPENCE

THE QUICK OR THE DEAD

BY

AMÉLIE RIVES

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS, LONDON, GLASGOW & NEW YORK

LIFE, FORTUNE, & HAPPINESS.

"Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.
"Ring out old shapes of foul disease,
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold,
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace."

TENNYSON.

IMPORTANT TO ALL.—As a natural product of nature, use ENO'S "FRUIT SALT." You cannot overstate its great value in keeping the BLOOD PURE. Without such a simple precaution the JEOPARDY of life is immensely increased. As a means of keeping the system clear, and thus taking away the groundwork of Malarious Diseases, and all Liver Complaints, or as a Health-giving, Refreshing, Cooling, and Invigorating Beverage, or as a Gentle Laxative and Tonic in the various forms of Indigestion.

From the Rev. J. W. NEIL, Holy Trinity Church, North Shields.

"November 1, 1873.

"DEAR SIR,—As an illustration of the beneficial effects of your 'FRUIT SALT,' I can have no hesitation in giving you the particulars of the case of one of my friends. His whole life was clouded by the want of vigorous health, and to such an extent did the sluggish action of the liver and its concomitant Bilious Headache affect him, that he was obliged to live upon only a few articles of diet, and to be most sparing in their use. This uncomfortable and involuntary asceticism, whilst it probably alleviated his sufferings, did nothing in effecting a cure, although persevered in for some twenty-five years; and also, to my knowledge, consulting very eminent members of the faculty, frequently even going to town for that purpose. By the use of your simple 'FRUIT SALT,' however, he now enjoys the vigorous health he so long coveted, he has never had a headache or constipation since he commenced to use it, about six months ago, and can partake of his food in such a hearty manner as to afford, as you may imagine, great satisfaction to himself and friends. There are others known to me to whom your remedy has been so beneficial in various kinds of complaints, that I think you may very well extend its use, both for your own interest and *pro bono publico*. I find myself that it ma kes a very refreshing and exhilarating drink.—I remain, dear sir, yours faithfully,

"J. W. NEIL."

"To J. C. ENO, Esq."

EUROPE, ASIA, AFRICA, AMERICA, AUSTRALIA.—IMPORTANT TO ALL TRAVELLERS.—"Please send me half-a-dozen bottles of ENO'S 'FRUIT SALT.' I have tried ENO'S 'FRUIT SALT' in America, India, Egypt, and on the Continent for almost every complaint, fever included, with the most satisfactory results. I can strongly recommend it to all Travellers; in fact, I am never without it.—Yours faithfully, AN ANGLO-INDIAN OFFICIAL, June 26th 1878."

"I used my 'FRUIT SALT' freely in my last severe attack of fever, and I have every reason to say it saved my life.

"J. C. ENO."

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RBR342

THE QUICK OR THE DEAD?

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QUICK OR THE DEAD?

A STUDY

BY

AMÉLIE RIVES

"Wanting is —— what?"—*Jocoseria.*

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THE QUICK OR THE DEAD?

I.

THERE was a soughing rain asweep that night, with no wind to drive it, yet it ceased and fell, sighed and was hushed incessantly, as by some changing gale. Barbara was a good deal unnerved by the lanternless drive from the station. The shelving road, seamed with abrupt gullies, lay through murk fields and stony hollows, that she well remembered; in the glimpsing lightning she saw scurrying trees against the suave autumn sky, like etchings on bluish paper; the dry, white-brown grasses swirled about the horses' feet in that windless rain; and after what thunderous fashion those horses pounded stableward! They hurled through narrow gateways like stones from a catapult, rushed past ragged trees whose boles seemed leaping to meet them, spun over large stones as though they had been mere fallen leaves.

The black driver urged his smoking team, as though dissatisfied with their prowess, by sharp, whistling inward breaths, and upward gestures of his bowed elbows. He was a grotesque figure against the pennons of lightning. Barbara had smiled in spite of her fear, becoming suddenly grave as they just grazed the corner of a slanting, half-ruined wall, formed of rough stones and clay, the "Brookfield Barn" of her childhood, and her fears were not calmed by recalling the fact that only twenty yards ahead stretched a long, ramshackle bridge, formed of loose planks held in place by wild grape-vine branches and a stone placed here and there. This bridge dipped its lithe middle almost into the waters of a hurling, brown stream, known in the surrounding country as "Machunk Creek." There were various legends regarding the origin of this name. The negroes said that a man had crossed it at one time, carrying a chunk of "fat" lightwood; when on the middle of the one plank, which then served for bridge, he had dropped his pine-knot, and screamed out desperately, "Oh! my chunk!" Hence

the title of the stream. Barbara, who had always unquestioningly believed this story, could almost fancy that she saw this swart, regretful figure poised now above the hurly of rain-swollen waters, —could almost hear his despairing cry. She thought of getting out of the trap and following his example by crossing on foot, when a dull, whirring rumble, followed by a certain rock-a-bye motion, told her that they were upon the bridge. She shut her eyes with an infallible womanly instinct, although it was then absolutely dark, caught a fold of her inner lip between her teeth, and pinched the back of her left hand firmly in the palm of her right. There was a jolt, a spattering scramble from the horses, another of those sharp, unique sounds from Unc' Joshua the driver, and off they sped once more into the ever-increasing gloom.

It was not until the next day that Barbara found there had been lanterns, with candles ready for lighting, on each side of her. She had been finally whirled in upon the gravel of the carriage-drive of Rosemary, and had dodged the familiar arms of the box-trees, that scraped and rattled against the sides of the flying carriage: then came orange blurs of light between thick, parted curtains, a semi-circular glare over the hall door, and little glowing ladders to right and left of it.

Her aunt Fridiswig had rushed to meet her, had embraced her by leaving a moist splash upon her elastic, night-cool cheek, and some of a pepper-and-salt shawl fringe caught in the button of her jacket. She had escaped finally, saying that she would like a cup of tea in her bedroom, and that her aunt could come and bid her good-night, but was on no account to sit up past her usual hour for retiring.

She was leaning now in an old, chintz-covered chair in front of a chestnut-wood fire. How vividly that chair recalled other days! She smiled a little drearily as she ran her fingers into a little slit in the stuff, which she had cut there herself, three years ago, while whittling a peg for her easel. She had brought no maid with her, having looked forward with a certain pleasure to the ministrations of the maid of her girlhood, a dark-brown creature, with a profile like that of Rameses II., and wearing countless slubs of black wool tied up with bits of white string. This person was moving about the room with a light, padding step, like that of a cat through wet grass. She was holding up and admiring her mistress's cast-off furs and under-wraps in the candle-light behind her back, passing her hand up and down the rich sables with a voluptuous ecstasy of appreciation; now tucking them beneath her chin and

regarding her reflection in the old-fashioned, gilt-framed toilet-glass, now burying her face in them with a shudderingly delighted movement of her shoulders. Barbara sat listless, her damp hair unwound about her shoulders, tapping the curled ends lightly against the palm of her hand as she dreamed, wide-eyed, in the uncertain firelight. The maid, Martha Ellen, or Rameses, as Barbara called her, came presently, and began to warm a pair of red-heeled bedroom slippers by holding them to the blaze, at the same time lifting one of her pretty, yellow-lined hands, palm outward, to protect her face.

The gesture went through Barbara like a knife. How Val used to laugh at it, when Martha Ellen went through the same performance of warming his slippers! She put up both hands to her breast with a movement of anguish. Tears clustered hot and stinging on her lashes, and great breaths that were deeper than sobs thrilled through her from head to foot. Ah, she had been a fool, doubtless, to come here, for, in the natural course of things, she must expect such painful occurrences twenty times a day; and yet there was a sorrowful sweetness in it, too. She let drop her hands, and, relaxing her tense figure, sent a slow, miserable look around the room. It was spacious, airy, southern. A delicate, dawn-like mixture of rose and grey characterized its furniture. The large, carved bed, of mahogany, had hangings of rose and white. There were white goat-skins here and there on the grey carpet, and some very good water-colours, by French artists, above the chimney-piece. The chairs and couches were many, and capacious. The number of mirrors suggested a certain vanity on the part of its occupant: there were eight in all, none of them small, and all framed heavily in old gilt. A mahogany writing-table near one of the windows had heavy brass handles, awink in the fitful light. Barbara rose suddenly, and, putting back her heavy hair, began to walk up and down the room on soft, slipperless feet.

"Wait, Miss Barb'ra, honey," urged Rameses, approaching her mistress on her knees and holding out the now very warm slippers. "You'll war out dem pretty stockin's."

Barbara stopped and stared down at her absently, then turned gently away and re-began her long, noiseless stride.

"You can go," she said. "Never mind the slippers. I'll call you presently."

As Rameses left the room, Barbara locked the door through which she had passed, and then, turning, with her hand still

on the key, took another long, scrutinizing survey of the room.

Presently she went to one of the windows and drew aside the curtain. The skirt of the sky was strewn from hem to hem with little, flittering, filmy clouds, through which a wet moon shone vaporous ; the tulip-trees, nearly stripped of their golden, October leaves, thrust their empty seed-cups out and up, like so many elfin goblets, to be filled with weird mist-wine ; the wind blew in puffs, like a thing breathing in its sleep, and the rain had ceased. Barbara's hair made a mellow glow in the wan light, and the already scarlet holly-berries blinked back at her from the frothy gloom of the shadow-waves. A horse neighed impatiently just below, and was answered from a far meadow. She could see the light from her windows streaking the faded grass on the lawn. With a sigh she let the curtain drape itself once more in its accustomed folds, pausing to rest both hands on the mahogany writing-table, and again devouring the room with that slow, absorbing gaze. As her returning eyes fell upon the table on which she leaned, she gave a strange cry, and pressed backward among the window curtains, still keeping a fixed, horrified look on the table. How bathos will intrude upon pathos ! It is the flippant Tweedledum of a most serious Tweedledee. The possible viper from which poor Barbara shrank was nothing more nor less than a half-smoked cigar, which lay in a neat little ash-tray among its ashes, just as the man who had been smoking it had placed it there three years ago. Suddenly she fell on her knees beside the table, and, snatching up the bit of tobacco, kissed it again and again. She was a woman with an almost terrible sense of humour, and presently she began to laugh, not hysterically, but quietly, appreciatively. She saw how ridiculous a thing that act of hers would seem to an on-looker. And then again she kissed it, and, catching her face into her two hands, went into a shuddering passion of sobs, tearless, noiseless, and terrible.

All this will not seem overstrained when one knows its origin.

In this room, among these identical articles, just three years ago, Barbara Pomfret had passed the first three months of an absolutely joyous married life ; two years ago her husband had died, and she had come back an utterly unhappy woman to the scene of her former happiness. Every chair, book, knick-knack, rug, in this room, was associated in some way with her husband. The very pictures, the toilet-glass, the ornaments on the mantel-shelf, all held for her some memory which stabbed her as she

looked ; and yet it was of her own will that she had returned. She did not wish to forget, and she could not better remember than in a place so fraught with memories. She had not, however, calculated the full poignancy of the grief that was about to claim her. As vanished scenes swept across her inner sight, there came with them words and looks and tones innumerable. His arms held her, his breath warmed her, his voice was in her ear, vibrating, actual. She leaped to her feet, stumbling over her heavy gown ; her fascinated, dreading eyes sought the vague gloom behind her, as she hurried to the door. The room was full of his voice, of his sighing, of his laughter. She breathed gaspingly, and caught at the key to unlock the door. It was stiff with long disusage, and refused to turn. There again! his laughter, about her, above her, and his lips at her ear. She could hear the words, loving, reckless, impassioned words, not meet for a ghost to utter : "Barbara ! Barbara ! your curled lips are a cup, and your breath is wine. Your make me drunk !—drunk !"

She grasped the key with both hands, panting, sobbing, her eyes strained with a mighty, overwhelming panic. Still the senseless bit of brass resisted. She caught up a fold of her gown and wound it about the handle. Now his very lips were on her : they drew her breath, her life.

"O God, help me ! O God, let the door open ! let it open !"

Miss Fridiswig, alone with her knitting, in the dining-room just below, heard a sudden noise as of falling, and burst out into the hall, to meet Rameses with her eyes goggling. They made a simultaneous rush up the stairway, and nearly fell over Barbara, who was lying on her face, half in and half out of her room.

Rameses, who was as strong as most men of her size, lifted the poor girl bodily, and laid her upon the bed.

They did all the disagreeable, useless things that people generally do to a fainting woman, and by and by, when it was time for her to return to consciousness, she opened her dark eyes, and drew several short, difficult breaths.

"I know—I know—" she said.

"You know what ?" coaxed Miss Fridiswig.

"I know—I know—" repeated Barbara, "I know—where I am. Must get—a—new lock—to-morrow. Rameses—sleep—in here —to-night. What's o'clock ?"

"Mos' twelve," said Rameses, who was holding Barbara's bare feet in her hands. "You go tuh bade, Miss Fridis. Miss Barb'ra, you go tuh bade too."

"Yes, darling, you must—for my sake," urged Miss Fridiswig.

"Not yet; not yet," said Barbara.

She tried to sit up, and fell back among the big pillows. A sudden shivering shook her throughout. She made another effort and got her arm about Rameses' neck.

"Help me—" she panted, "help me—off the bed—quick. That sofa there—"

When they had made her comfortable on the sofa, she closed her eyes and lay so still that they thought she had fainted again; but as Rameses moved to fetch some of the noxious remedies, she pressed down a fair hand on the girl's wool, signifying that she was to remain beside her.

"You go tuh bade, Miss Fridis," said Rameses. "'Tain't no use two on us settin' up."

"No, not a bit," said Barbara. "Please go, Aunt Fridis."

"Ah, let me be of use! let me be of use!" wailed Miss Fridiswig, casting herself on her knees beside Rameses, and leaving another warm splash on Barbara's inert hand.

Barbara, who never willingly hurt the feelings even of a cabman, did not know what to do, until it suddenly occurred to her to faint again. When she came to herself from this simulated swoon, Rameses had packed Miss Fridiswig, willy-nilly, to her virgin slumbers, and was resuscitating the dead fire by breathing on it, after the Biblical method.

Barbara lay watching her, stung again by an almost intolerable pang. How often had she lain on that very sofa and watched Val trying to imitate the negro method of kindling a fire, until his puffed-out cheeks made him into a very excellent likeness of a wind-god couchant!

When the wreathing, lilac flames began to whirr about the fresh logs, she called the girl to her.

"Are you very sleepy?" she said, smiling a beautiful smile that Martha Ellen remembered. It was associated with countless gifts and seemed to breathe of the summer, a season endeared above all others to the sensitive little black.

"Lor'! Yuh looks jes' like yuh use tuh!" she exclaimed, regardless of Barbara's question. "I thought yuh done give up smilin' when I seed yuh fust tuh-night."

"Did you?" said Barbara. She smiled again, and yielded her hand graciously to the girl's caresses, repeating her question. Martha Ellen asserted that she didn't feel sleep "nowhar near 'bout her."

"But it must be very late!" Barbara said. "Are all the other servants in bed?"

Martha Ellen thought so, and slipped a lithe arm about her mistress, who stood still for an instant, while the apparent seething of the articles about her subsided. She was tall, and her figure in its silverish dressing-gown of white silk gleamed like a streak of moonlight in the rich dusk. I once saw a stem of white wild-flowers lean against a charred pine as she was now leaning against her dark-skinned waiting-woman.

Presently she moved a step or two. The girl moved with her, bending beneath the bare white arm that rested heavily across her shoulders. As they paused again, she turned her face up, with a sideward, expectant movement.

"I was going to say," Barbara began, "that if you know where the little brass bed is—the one I used to sleep in as a little girl—I would help you to get it."

"Naw, you ain't; you ain' gwine he'p me git nuthin'," said Martha Ellen, positively.

Her mistress was as positive. "It is entirely too heavy for you to lift alone," she said. "If you know where it is, I am coming with you to help you."

They went together down a narrow corridor that turned abruptly several times, Martha Ellen in front with a candle that died out to a blue splutter in the many draughts.

Following this elfish light, Barbara found herself at last in the nursery of her childhood. She looked upward and remembered the very cracks in the plaster ceiling: there was the identical one that she had thought resembled the profile of George Washington on the postage-stamps. Underneath it stood the brass cot. It was somewhat tarnished, and the bows of pale-blue ribbon that enlivened its head-piece were decidedly draggled. She untied them mechanically and rolled them around her fingers, while Martha Ellen took off the unsheeted mattresses. How long it was since she had slept in that gay little bed! There is nothing that makes us seem so unreal, so unfamiliar to ourselves, as some pleasant child-possession seen unexpectedly in unhappy womanhood.

She kneeled long beside it that night, with palms pressed hard against her eyes, forgetting to pray, in a great, struggling effort to imagine herself once more a child, pleading for her pony's tail to "grow as long as before the calf chewed it," for "Mammy to be white in heaven," for "Satan to be forgiven after a long, long

long time," for herself to be made a "good little girl and not so cross with Agnes."

At first she was not conscious of any especial emotion, as she bent against the cold linen of the turned-back bedclothes; she had no particular sensation either of happiness or unhappiness; but presently vast waves of passionate regret, and longing, and rebellion surged over her, each one, as it swelled and formed, more vast and annihilating than the other. The undertow seemed dragging her down, down. God's imagined face took on a horrible grinning. The ministering angels seemed deformed creatures who writhed, and twisted, and uttered wanton gigglings as they circled about the Throne after the fashion of the witches in "Macbeth" about the caldron. Nothing seemed good; nothing seemed kind. She could not even think of her husband as having existed. He was a mere mass of repulsive formlessness in a slimy wedge of earth; perhaps he was not even that. She imagined his ghastly skeleton tricked out in all the mockery of fashionable attire. What delightful, smart, of-the-world-worldly coats he had worn! Why, if he were a skeleton now, one could see his tailor's name in gilt letters through his spinal column! Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha! She had laughed silently at first, then in a choking whisper, then in a ringing peal of sound that clashed through the silent house chilling the blood in Martha Ellen's rigid black body.

It did not occur to her to go her mistress. She sat up on the pallet where she was sleeping for the night, folded herself in her own embrace, and muttered between her clacking teeth,—

"Miss Barb'ra done gone mad! she done gone mad! *I* dunno what tuh do! Gord knows *I* dunno what tuh do!" Then all as suddenly the laughter ceased.

There seemed to Barbara to be some glowing, resplendent presence about her, lifting up her heart as it were with both hands. She took down her palms from her strained eyes, and stared into the almost absolute gloom. She even reached out her arms into it. The darkness seemed to cling about her. Little, every-day noises distracted her attention—the snap of the dying fire as it settled among its ashes, the lull and sough of an awakening wind through the branches of the tulip-trees, the noise that a mouse made dragging some little thing along the floor She rose stiffly to her feet, and cowered shivering down among the icy sheets. Again she held out her arms. The pressure of a warm, curly head against her breast was with her as an actuality.

"Oh, Val," she whispered—"oh, Val! Oh, darling—mine!—mine!—mine! Touch me, come to me, here in the darkness—here where you used to love me. I will not be afraid—no, not the least, not the least. Oh! God—God! he does not hear me! he cannot hear me! he does not care any more."

She flung herself half out of her childhood's bed upon the large one of carved mahogany near which it stood, sobbing, shuddering, kissing wildly the silken coverlet and pillows that rose softly through the thick firelight, so finally slept, worn out, desolate, chilled to the very core of soul and body.

II.

ROSEMARY was one of those old Virginia houses which have not been desecrated with modern furniture, as grey hair with hair-dye. Its rooms were gloomy in contour and atmosphere, but cheered by bright hangings and flowers, like an old face with smiles. The house of deep-red brick showed in sanguine streaks through tangled vines, something after the fashion in which a Nereid's face might blush behind her veil of verdant hair. There were many old portraits in the large hall, as darkly ruddy in colour as the outer walls of the mansion which they adorned. An old spinet stood in the music-room, from which instrument Miss Fridiswig used to coax forth ghastly jinkings (this spinet could not utter anything so liquid as a jingle) on Sunday afternoons.

It was a most lovely old place to die in, but not, assuredly, one in which to live. There was a suggestion of loneliness even about its vegetable life which seemed depressing. Its trees, with the exception of the tulip-poplars and acacias, were all mateless, not two of any kind. Its flowers did not grow socially in beds, but here and there throughout the tangled grass. The very stalks of corn in the kitchen-garden leaned away from each other. There was one dog, one cat, one horse, one vehicle which Miss Fridiswig called a carry-all, and one aged black to drive it. Barbara preferred walking to this means of locomotion, and was sometimes out from early morning until the woods were full of lean shadows, that seemed as hungry as herself.

With what an appetite she used to return to Rosemary! She sometimes drank three cups of tea, and ate two partridges, together with numberless biscuits, for supper. Miss Fridiswig, after having asserted on several occasions that she would "ruin her stummick," considered an unpleasant duty to have been performed, and refrained from further remark. Miss Fridiswig was amiable and unobtrusive, and, when she did not perform on the spinet, Barbara liked to think that she was in the house.

October in Eden could not have been more perfect than October in Virginia—indeed, far less so, as the ever-verdant leaves in that garden could never have fallen brownly to the ground and so rustled almost to the very knees of a person walking through them.

During these autumnal rambles, Barbara seemed to leave her wedded self at Rosemary, and to pursue her maiden self with all the sweet if sad persistency of a Dryad seeking her forsaken tree.

It was as if Happiness lurked somewhere in the golden-glad depths of those many-stemmed woods, waiting only for the clasp upon her kissing wings.

A sudden resolve one day took possession of Barbara. It occurred to her while putting on her gloomy bonnet of heaviest crape. She tossed it from her with a sudden resolve, and unwound the severe plaits of her copper-brown hair, allowing them to curl richly into a floating background for the clear but vivid pallor of her face. Ten years appeared to have fallen from her with that burnished coronal. The airy grace of girlhood seemed entangled in her airy tresses. She then as hastily put off her sombre gown, and, going to an old press, felt along its shelves until she had brought to light several articles, in which she began to dress herself. Her toilet accomplished, she looked like a girl of sixteen who had gotten herself up in as near emulation of some favourite brother as possible. This boyish costume consisted of a dark-blue flannel shirt, a short, clay-stained corduroy skirt, a leather belt, a pair of chamois-skin shooting-gaiters, and a pair of stout laced boots.

She gave one fleeting glance at herself in the toilet-glass, and then, pulling on a dark-blue Tam O'Shanter as she ran, fled from the room, down-stairs, out of door, far into the wind-stirred forest.

She sank at last upon a fallen tree, and glanced, panting gayly, at the beauty surrounding her. A flying squirrel whirred past

her head, and, alighting on a bole just beyond her, began its light, scratching ascent. A ground-swell of wind, as it were, just lifted the overlapping leaves about her feet; while she could hear the occasional patter of an acorn in the gold-barred silence to right and left, like the intermittent tick of some genial old clock, that disliked to tell more constantly the passing of such glorious hours.

There was a soft blue haze lying close to the forest-floor, through which its boles and undergrowth darted blackly upward, like figures from some tremendous witch-smoke, and a trail of Virginia creeper spurting redly across the foreground suggested the blood-spurt from the victim in the unholy sacrifice.

Barbara rested movelessly, absorbing the beauty about her through the very pores of her soul. The roots of the fallen tree against which she leaned, reaching crookedly towards a bough of golden maple leaves overhead, reminded her of the fingers of a miser scooped to clutch his gold. She laughed with a sudden whim.

"You shall have it!" she said, springing out and grasping the bough, which she shook back and forth with all her strong young might. She was an enchanting Danaë under the shower of gold leaves, the supple lines of her strained figure melting into the vaporous blue-grey of the wood beyond, her eyes laughing above the unusual carmine in her cheeks.

It seemed a pity that the only witness to this ravishing scene should be a little darky, with an embarrassing paucity of breeches, and a ragged coat which trailed upon the ground behind.

He paused, grasping a young sapling which he was dragging after him, and gazed up at Barbara, who, pausing also, gazed down at him. He was short and wizened, and had narrow, blue-black feet, upon which he stood gingerly, the yellow-lined great toes curled heavenward. His oily eyes were small, his countenance a dense bitumen hue, his inner lips, hanging outward with astonishment, of a pale, moist pink, like that of a toadstool rained upon. He was impish and uncouth even for a little nigger, and looked like a crayon sketch after a painting of Robin Goodfellow.

"How-d'e-do?" said Barbara.

He replied with the staccato precision of a telegraph machine,—

"I'se fus'-rate. How's yo'se'f?"

"Thanks, I am in excellent health also," replied Barbara. "Will you tell me where you are going?"

"Chissnuts," said the imp, laconically.

"Chestnuts!" echoed Barbara. She loosed the maple bough, which swung in stately nudity to its accustomed place, and came forward dusting lightly together her gloved palms. The knotty miser-roots were now full of the plenteous gold, and she looked back at them over her shoulder and smiled, before addressing the boy, to whom presently she said, in a pleasant voice,—

"Will you let me go with you, Robin Goodfellow?"

"'Tain't my name," he answered, with the same brevity which had heretofore distinguished his remarks.

"No, but it is my name for you," said Barbara, gravely. "What have you to say to that?"

He lowered one of his taut big toes, and burrowed with it in the soft loam.

"Nothin'," he finally announced.

"Shall I come with you?"

"Ef yuh wants."

"I do want. I want some chestnuts."

At this the imp grinned cunningly. "Yuh'll have tuh pay fuh 'em, den," said he.

"I'll do that now," returned Barbara, taking a quarter from a netted purse, which she always carried for this very purpose.

His little eyes seemed to dart towards it like those of a crab, and he drew a swift tongue over both podgy lips, with the air of a *gourmet* regarding a well-cooked ortolan, while the cunning look on his face increased in proportion as the grin vanished.

"You gimme dat fus', 'n' den I'll thrash de tree fuh yuh," he suggested.

"You thrash the tree for me first, and then I'll give you this," replied Barbara, firmly.

"All ri'," he said, a certain glaze which avarice had spread like a coat of varnish over his black skin vanishing, to leave it as dully grimy as before.

"By the way, what is your name?" Barbara asked, as she walked beside him on their way to the chestnut-tree.

"Mos' anythin'."

"Well, what is it as a rule?"

"Mh?" said the child.

"What does your mother call you?"

"'Honey' when she's please', 'n' 'you Satan' when she ain'."

"Hadn't you rather be called Robin Goodfellow than Satan?"

"I don' keer."

"If I give you this quarter and another for the chestnuts, will you answer when I call you Robin Goodfellow?"

"Mh—mh."

She put the quarter in his upreached palm, and he transferred it thence to one of his cheeks, the monkey-like pouch where a young negro carries most of his valuables. It made an eerie clinking against his teeth as he talked; and when she finally bade him good bye, and gave him the other quarter, he tucked it away in the opposite cheek.

Barbara was so pleased with this unique and non-committal young imp that she took him shortly into her service. He carried her easel and colour-box when she sketched, and occupied the back seat of her Canadian fishing-waggon when she drove. During her day-long rambles he was nearly always to be seen trotting at her heels, and he slept on a bearskin rug just outside of her door. She had at first attempted to dress him picturesquely, but the result was not encouraging. When Beauregard Walsingham (for such Barbara discovered to be his real name) first beheld himself in his mistress's mirror, thus attired, he gave vent to a choked howl of dismay and anger, and fled to the linen-closet. From thence he was unearthed, not too gently, by Rameses, who had no liking for him, and usually spoke of him as "that limb," having declared him to be "ez ugly ez home-made sin 'n' ez black as the hinges uv midnight."

On being asked the cause of his excitement, Beauregard replied that he "wa'n't no circus clown, en folks done think he cunjud (conjured) if he war dem dar things."

Barbara attempted to reason with him, but it was useless; and she at last adopted a stern and superior pose, and had the butler place him bodily on the back seat of the fishing-waggon. He sat there, it is true, but the fixed war-light in his greasy eyes was ominous.

His duty on these occasions was to open the many gates which distinguish Albemarle neighbourhoods. The first one on this afternoon gave almost directly upon the brawlings of Machunk Creek, and after Barbara had driven through, and was waiting for him to resume his place behind her, he turned abruptly, and, with respectful but dogged determination, waded out into the middle of the stream, cast himself upon his scarlet-sashed little stomach, and rolled. A muddy unity of tone was the result. Barbara looked ahead as if nothing had happened, until he began to climb into the cart; she then informed him that he was to follow on foot the rest

of the way, and she made the occasion live forever in his memory by driving eight miles. It probably kept him from taking cold, but it also subdued his dauntless spirit, because, although he made no signs of giving in, when Rameses girded his loins next day with another as brilliant sash, he wore it meekly until Barbara herself removed it before he went to bed.

Having conquered, she, woman-like, bestowed upon him that for which he had fought,—namely, an ordinary costume, composed of dark brown cloth and silver buttons. So closely did this attire fit, and so perfectly did it match young Walsingham's complexion, that at a little distance he looked like a bronze nudity picked out with silver.

He was a strange, subtle little creature, of few words and secretive habits. He had a melancholy instrument upon which he used to play "Home, Sweet Home." Rameses called it a "mouth-harp," and it used to set all the dogs howling—for Barbara had bought two greyhound pups, which she was training.

Between the spinet and the mouth-harp, Barbara was sometimes very miserable; but she could not find it in her heart to separate Beauregard from the one object of his affection, which actually slept in his dusky bosom every night.

Her girlhood's costume, once adopted, was worn as a constancy, the walks which she took being of too wild and secluded a nature to subject her to remark from any of the neighbours. She resembled the heroine of a witch-tale, figuring all the week as a bright-eyed, wild-haired brownie, and becoming on the Sabbath a sad, unspeaking woman, with demure dark lids over eyes yet more demure and dark.

During those vagrant autumn days she became mistress of a rare art, that of controlling her thoughts. She found that by a tremendous effort she could whistle them to fist and keep them hooded there, so that, although they fretted and shook their bells, they did not soar away into the open and bring down unsavoury winged things which she would rather remained a-wing. Those first, horrible imaginings haunted her no more. Her husband was with her now as the glad-eyed lover of her young wifehood. She remembered his rollicking laughter, recalled the movements of his eyes, walked often with the very warmness of his arm about her body. She would not allow herself to think of the coming snow, and her life seemed a supportable waiting, a not altogether sad wandering after something which at length she would discover.

She returned one evening far into the orange-belted radiance of

the heavy twilight. There were boughs of glowing leaves about her shoulders, which framed her face as though in reality she were a Dryad, looking through the screen of her guarding foliage, and she held the greyhounds in a light leash, singing, as she walked, parts of a song that her husband had especially liked :

"Bravo ! Bravo ! Punchinello !
Bravo, Pun-chi-ne-ell-o !"

She had not a strong voice, but it was clear and carried well, and was pleasant to drowsy ears—a twilight and firelight voice—one in which to sing elf-songs, and ghostly ditties, or some such lay as this story of Punchinello.

As she came up the long, narrow lawn, overbent by tall acacias, she could see the wavering glare of a large fire in the drawing-room. How often she and Valentine had hailed that leaping, twisting light on their home-coming after just such walks ! She ceased suddenly to sing, and dropped on her knees in the rank grass, while the greyhounds leaped awkwardly upon her, having no instinct to tell them when women kneel for prayer and when for play. She had been thrilled with a possessing sense of his nearness : he was about her, close against her with the other impalpable essences of this still, gold-grey evening. The light in the drawing-room died down, almost went out, then leaped higher than ever : someone had thrown on more wood. Kneeling there on the windy lawn had chilled and dispirited her. She rose to her feet, still grasping the gay leaf-masses, and entered the house.

With her hand on the drawing-room door, she paused. It seemed as though an actual force was urging her away ; and yet there was no one there. She turned and looked first over one shoulder, then over the other, with a bird-swift gesture. No one. The puppies left outside were whining and scratching for admittance. She hesitated, thinking for a moment that she would let them in, but some strange feeling withheld her. Then tossing wide the door with an impetuous movement, she went rushingly into the very middle of the room, where she regretted her impulsiveness, for she saw that a man was standing before the fire. He was bending slightly towards the blaze and scooping his hands to it—a very ordinary gesture, but one that hurt her. A man may be individual even in his method of warming his hands, and this was her husband's gesture.

During the moment in which this knowledge pierced her heart, the man saw her, and came forward. She began to think that she

was in a dream—the figure, the step, the pose, were so identically her husband's; but the greatest shock of all was when he spoke.

"You must be Barbara," was what he said, and the voice was Val's voice. The room swung about, and the fire leaped forward to meet her. She put out her hand, letting fall the red leaves which she still held. The man who had spoken with her husband's voice now supported her to a chair with the very trick of arm that he had been wont to use. She shut her eyes, fearing absolutely to look up, and put out both hands, as though to push him from her, while he kneeled to place a footstool under her feet, and then rose and slipped a cushion between her head and the stiff chair-back. During these different movements he uttered various disjointed sentences: "So sorry! Ought to have waited. Ought to have rung for lights. Firelight confused you. By the way, I'm Jock—Val's cousin, you know. He told me so much—I—I mean I've heard so much about you—feel as if I knew you, you know. Are you all right now? Do look at me: it'll steady you. There's—there's a strong likeness."

"I had rather rest a little—thank you so much," said Barbara. The firelight through her hot lids made them seem like live coals resting upon her eyes, while her mind and body seemed to sweep in circles like a bird at poise. He had unconsciously named the very thing that she dreaded. Were this "strong likeness" of feature as marked as every other, she thought that endurance would be impossible. She ventured to lift her eyes to the hand resting on her chair-arm: it might have been thrust from the grave. She gave a sobbing cry and started to her feet. Dering rose also, startled and alarmed.

"You are ill," he said. "Shall I call your maid?"

"I will call her," said Barbara; "I will call her." She flew past him to the door, passed through it, and was gone.

Dering's sensations were not enviable. He walked to the fire and began to warm his hands again.

"I flatter myself that I know something about men," he said, rather grumpily, "but I'm hanged if I know a thing about women." He then nestled down with a boyish movement of entire content into the chair that Barbara had abandoned, and waited for further developments.

Nothing occurred until half an hour later, when Barbara herself re-entered the room. He scarcely knew her at first, in her long black crape gown, with her diadem of lustrous braids replaced, and

he wondered, as he took the hand which she now held out, if she were ever going to lift her lids.

"She's handsome," he said to himself, "but she's too blonde and too big. Her waist's too big—no, it's her shoulders—no, she's all too big. Her hair's too red—no, there's too much of it—no, it's the way she wears it."

Barbara, who was very apt at such things, did not rightly fathom his thoughts on this occasion. She believed that he was pondering on her pallor and red lids, and wondering if she had been enough in love with his cousin to justify such a quantity of crape. If acknowledged beauties could know the thoughts of most men when first introduced to them, there would not be so much vanity in the world.

Barbara, who was an acknowledged beauty, did not strike any responsive chord in Dering until she turned him her profile in settling the folds of her dress. It was vigorous, classic, enthralling, and he admitted as much to himself while regarding it.

"Good brow," he meditated; "good nose; good line of lips—well balanced, upper and lower equal; good chin, splendid chin, massive but not heavy. Lots of will-power—no end to it."

"Won't you sit down?" said Barbara. She did not look at him, and held out a hand-screen between the flames and her face, so that he could no longer see it.

"Thanks," said Dering, resuming his nestling position.

Suddenly Barbara laughed.

"You remind me of a dog turning around before he lies down," she said, in explanation.

"Lots of people have said that," he replied, easily, laughing also.

Barbara winced a little, and the light died from her eyes. She had heard a great deal of Jock Dering, and was prepared to like him most heartily, but if he continued to speak to her in her husband's very voice, how was she to bear it? They talked a little in a desultory way, and presently a half-burned log fell crashing down upon the hearth. As Dering stooped to replace it, Barbara involuntarily lifted her eyes to his face. He was startled by the soft huddling against him of her unconscious body.

III.

THE extraordinary likeness which John Dering bore to his dead cousin Valentine Pomfret was one of those rare but not fictitious freaks in which heredity sometimes indulges. Twin brothers are often less alike than had been those two young men, and the fact that Dering was Pomfret's junior by a few years was overcome by the further fact that for a few years poor Pomfret had been dead; Barbara therefore beheld in the Dering of to-day the exact reproduction of her husband of three years ago. Voice, gesture, figure, and face were all identical. There was the same curling brown hair above a square, strongly modelled forehead; eyes the colour of autumn pools in sunlight; the determined yet delicate jut of the nose; the pleasing unevenness in the crowded white teeth, and the fine jaw which had that curve from ear to tip like the prow of a cutter. An unusual face, one in which every new acquaintance would not be apt to recall hints of some friend or relative.

In manner he was delightful,—abrupt, frank, original, and a trifle egotistical: in a word, Valentine Pomfret over again.

Barbara, who had not, of course, distinguished these further similarities between the quick and the dead, was sufficiently overcome by the physical likeness. Its memory swept over her, now with a species of horror, now with a sort of joy. She was in turns flooded with rapture at having seen again her husband's face, and torn with an impotent rage that any human creature should dare to move and have his being in so exact a similitude of that dear body. She experienced the feeling, intensified a hundred times, which rends a mother in seeing some careless friend or sister flaunting the garments of her dead child. Now she yearned for another sight of the dear face; now she flung the idea from her as utterly unnatural and abhorrent. She snatched Val's miniature, warm with her bosom, and pressed it to her lips, then opened the thin gold case, and hungrily fed upon its every tint and contour When she finally dropped it back beneath her gown, the case having grown cold in the air, startled her flesh, as a certain fact had startled her mind while gazing upon the portrait within. His pictured face was not so much like him as was the face of his cousin, John Dering! She was in her bedroom, and alone, so did not forbear to cry out, and moan, and talk to herself

in panting fragments, as she swept about the room, taking first a vibrating stride or two, then leaning against some piece of furniture and pressing away the hair from her face with both hands; then crouching and trembling with hidden eyes, or rushing from wall to wall with all the restrained, breathless eagerness of some prisoned, pantherish creature whose efforts for freedom had long been vain.

As she flung herself exhausted into an arm-chair near the fire, the wide sleeve of her dressing-gown fell back, revealing the smooth flesh of her arm, stained violet here and there by the rich veins.

She bent, uttering a sharp, inarticulate cry, and caressed it with slow movements of her cheek. She remembered how he had loved to kiss her delicate, inner arm when dressed in this very gown, and even as she smiled for the dear memory, there came upon her, with a surge of rebellion and revolt, the knowledge that he was now above such fleshly pleasures; that he would not now care for any of the sweet, warm, trivial things for which he had once cared so passionately. She leaped up, lifting her hands high above her head and pressing them agonizedly together. She tried to realize that he was a spirit, a purified essence, a soul merely; and as the idea took shape within her, she shrank from and loathed it, then fell into bitter human weeping, sometimes pleading for death, sometimes asking that God would work only His will with her.

Dering, who was happily ignorant of the effect which his appearance had produced, called again the next afternoon, to inquire for her health, but was told that she had gone to walk. He remained for some time, hoping that she would return, but took his leave after an hour, wondering somewhat that a woman who fainted so easily should trust herself alone on such long walks. The next time he saw her was in the heart of an oak plantation called the "Tarleton Woods." He had plunged recklessly into its unknown vistas after a covey of partridges, and had fancied himself lost, until he came upon Barbara.

She was seated high above him in the crotch of an old tree, and the full light fell upon her in splashes through the leaves, like an overflow of some bright liquid. The greyhounds were whimpering and scratching at the bole of the tree, and she teased them by swinging the loop of their leash just out of reach.

Dering spoke when within a few yards of her. "So glad you are all right!" he cried, boyishly. "I called three times, but you

were always out. You seem possessed of the spirit of locomotion."

She looked at him from beneath her loosened hair, and controlled her voice successfully in replying. She said that she was very sorry to have missed him, but that she was generally out all day in both good and bad weather.

"Can't I call in the evening, then?" asked Dering.

She could not think of any plausible excuse, and said, "Yes."

"You don't say it very cordially," he objected, but in blithe, unoffended tones. "Perhaps you'd rather I wouldn't come? Perhaps people bore you?"

Barbara could not help laughing. This seemed to embolden Dering, who advanced and looked up at her. "Do you know I think we'd be such good friends?" he said, genially.

"Why, I've scarcely spoken two words to you," replied Barbara.

"One feels things sometimes," said Dering, not at all discomfited. "I was sure I would like you as soon as I saw your profile."

"And how about it now that you have seen my full face?"

"Oh, I like it better and better. It has a generous, sensuous breadth that is splendid."

"Nothing else in 'ous,' I hope?" said Barbara, dryly.

"Nothing you wouldn't like. I see you think me very free and easy. People often do."

"I don't wonder," said Barbara, laughing again.

"Well, as long as you aren't angry I don't care. You laugh like a sport."

"Like a what?" said Barbara.

Dering shifted his position, and lounged against the tree-trunk.

"Yes, it's slang," he replied. "I've an awful habit of using slang: I'm afraid I'd use it to the Almighty if I were suddenly translated."

"You'd probably have to be translated for Him to understand," began Barbara, merrily, then stopped and coloured.

"That's a dreadfully bad pun," she said, with humility.

"If you weren't up a tree already, I wouldn't spare you," answered Dering.

"That's much worse than mine."

"I know it: I did it on purpose. Are you going to let me call?"

"Why, yes, of course. Why do you doubt it?"

"I don't know. I'm an odd fellow. I fancied you had taken a dislike to me."

"No, I have not," asserted Barbara, in a decided voice.

Then she grew very pale, and looked at him strangely. "I will explain what made you believe that some day," she said.

She did not understand the violent revulsion of feeling which had come upon her. She was glad, delighted, to be looking at him. It did not shock her as she had dreaded. She felt light-hearted and gay as she had not hoped to feel any more. She was only afraid that he would notice the absorbed, thirsting stare with which her eyes returned again and again to his eyes, and tried to fix them on other objects—the dance of the sunlit leaves, the grey-hounds, a cardinal-bird that seemed to streak the veiled back-ground with its flame-like flashings. In vain. Something of the feeling that impels a wilful drunkard seized upon her. She would intoxicate her bodily self with this long-denied sight; she would drink him into the waste places of her soul and make memory green again; she would—here a sudden shivering overtook her—why should she not pretend in truth that he was her husband? It would be known only to herself; an empty pleasure; a mere painting of delight; heaven reflected in a pool. The shivering became so violent that Dering noticed it.

"You are cold," he exclaimed, quickly. "Don't you think you stay out too late in these chilly autumn evenings? You see the sun is almost set."

"Yes, I must go," said Barbara.

He reached up and swung her to the ground. It was a light, easy gesture, full of the restrained power that women like. To feel a strong man minister to their fragile wants has all the fascination of watching a steam-hammer employed in the frivolous occupation of cracking almonds. To see the power that could crush trans-formed into the power that befriends is in both cases blood-stirring. And then his strong shoulders beneath her hands were so like Val's shoulders, and the glint of his smile Val's own, and his impetuous way of piloting her over rough places—all Val's. She stopped suddenly and put up her hands to her throat with a wild gesture. Dering pulled up short also, terribly alarmed, and fearing that she was going to faint again. He could not think what he was to do in these lonely woods on the edge of dark with a swoon-ing woman, and a slight feeling of irritation stung him.

"Good Lord!" he said, grasping her arm a little roughly, "you don't feel faint, do you?"

"No, no: just stifled for a minute," answered Barbara; but as they walked on he said, rather dogmatically, that in her state of

health it was little short of outrageous for her to be so much alone.

"My state of health!" cried Barbara, feeling also irritated. "There was never a healthier woman than I!"

Indeed?" said Dering, dryly. "You won't deny, perhaps, that there have been more prudent ones?"

Barbara was silent. She felt that she could not then explain anything to him, and dragged him forward in her eagerness to be out of that shadow-striped, many-noised wood. Dering's irritation vanished as he felt the violent tremblings which swept her from time to time.

IV.

THEY stepped from the shelter of the woods into the teeth of a brown gale. The hills lay in overlapping wedges of grey-violet against a long ribbon of wan light, the Scotch weather-glim. The fields were a seething reach of dark-grey weeds and grasses; the sky a flapping cloak of grey, blown back from the shoulders of some invisible giantess, and the shadows on the bleached downs her footprints.

The wind blew in volumes bulging with fierce sound. It hurled Barbara and Dering against one another, and tore away her hat, next enveloped them in a sudden eddy of whirling sticks and leaves. Dering stooped his head and shouted,—

"We can't go on in this. Isn't there some big tree we can get under?"

"Yes, there is a tulip-tree at the foot of that hill," shrieked Barbara, putting her lips close to his ear.

He was conscious of her warm breath amid all that hurly.

They then struggled down-hill together, and at the bottom were confronted by a tearing stream, shaggy with foam. He was hesitating what method to pursue, when Barbara sprang forward and leaped deliberately, first in and then out of the water, which was at no place very deep. He followed, angry again.

"I never—saw—such—a—reckless—woman!" he roared. But the wind blew his words backward, and Barbara did not hear them. She ran ahead and crouched down finally among the

overhanging roots of an enormous tree, and he came and seated himself beside her. Together they looked at the western sky. It was one vast, ragged confusion of cloud and glare. The naked branches of the trees along the road knotted and unknotted themselves angrily, and through them the wind slithered and hissed like a winged serpent.

"You must be bitterly cold," said Dering. "And your feet are wet, too."

"No," answered Barbara. Then she turned her face towards him with its up-blowing swirls of hair. He could make out nothing distinctly, beyond the glisten of her eyes as the strange light caught them.

"I like it," she said. "It rouses me. It stings, but it wakens."

"That is why I like it," responded Dering, briefly. "It is like drinking a witch-brew—cold in the mouth, hot in the vitals. I wish we could be blown for a long way over those hustling tree-tops."

"Yes, I wish so. One cannot think much in such an uproar except such thoughts as it suggests."

"You mean one cannot hark backward," said Dering.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I am beginning to feel your thoughts as they form."

"It is the wind. I am always full of electricity in a wind like this."

"I feel it. I can tell you where your hands are without looking at you."

"Where are they?"

"One over the other against your breast."

"Why, how strange!"

"You see I am different too in the wind."

"Yes, you are. We are like trees. The wind is our soul. It blows life into us. Without it we are mere vegetables."

"I can't think of you as a vegetable," said Dering, and they laughed a little. She drew nearer him; he could feel the thick stuff of her gown press against him in the blurred gloom. The wind whirled around them, like an invisible elf romping.

"Your voice sounds so strange and bodiless," said Barbara. "I can just see you."

"And I can just see you. It is the light of dreams."

"And of the places after death. You seem like a ghost."

"You talk like one," said Dering. "You are entirely different in this mood from what I thought you."

"Perhaps you thought that vividly-coloured people never had grey thoughts?"

"Perhaps."

"You see that they do, though. I feel as though I had taken wine. I want to talk. I want to say many things to you. They surge up in my mind as the wind does in the woods there. Do you think me crazy?"

"No, but I feel a little crazy myself. You are like a big, flute-voiced elf-queen sitting there with only your eyes aglow. Everything has changed about you—my ideas and all." He laughed again.

"What does it matter? Let us give each other our red-hot thoughts, not wait for them to cool to cinders in the breath of conventionality and commonplace."

"I will give you one now, then."

"What is it?"

"I like you."

"You did not like me at first, then?"

"No; I thought you ordinary."

"What has made you change your opinion?"

"Perhaps you are really an elf-queen."

"Was it not the daughters of the elf-king who were hollow and had no hearts?"

"That was because they were stuffed so full of precious thoughts that some thief stole them, and they gave their hearts away."

"Women never give away their hearts."

"What then?"

"They are torn up, like the flowers of Eastern legend, that men may find jewels at their roots."

"You are a strange woman."

"You are a strange man."

"If I were a doctor I should say you had a fever."

"I feel as though I had. See how hot my hand is, and I have my glove off."

He took her bare hand in his; their full pulses throbbed into one. She gazed at him with sparkling eyes; her lips curled corner-wise into a smile, and she drew ragged, uneven breaths. She fancied that it would be like this if she had gone to visit her husband's grave in this ghoul-light, and he had come up in his grave-clothes and sat on its edge and talked to her. But Dering's hand was not the hand of the dead. She drew hers away suddenly, and started to her feet, when a slanting blast dashed her

down again beside him. Putting out his hand to draw her furs closer about her, he let it rest against her throat. She shivered, and sunk down a little from his touch.

"Barbara," he said, unsteadily, "you have played me some witch-trick. What is this I feel for you? It is gruesome, but strong. I feel as though I did not want to leave you. I hate this murky half-glimmer, and yet I would be content to sit here with you day after day, night after night, for a long time. I think my mind must be akin to your mind. I am hungry for your thoughts. If you were Amina in the story, I think I would wait for you at the churchyard gate every night and not be afraid."

Then she began to laugh, wild, clamorous laughter, made loud or low as the wind swelled or withdrew.

"Yes, yes, yes," she said, "that is what I am—Amina. I live on dead bodies. I am only happy when prying into a grave. Churchyards are my lurking-places. I must begin to eat rice with a bodkin."

He held her firmly, still with his hand on her throat.

"Go on," he said, after a while, in a perfectly grave voice. "I seem to understand your wild mood in some strange way. I shan't attempt to reason with you. Some day you'll tell me everything."

"Yes, everything, everything," she panted, pressing close to him. "You are good to understand. It sounds very crazy, I know."

"I think you must have suffered a great deal."

"I have! I have!" she said, sobbingly. "Oh, I wish I could tell you now!"

"You shall tell me only when you wish to. If it is now, I will listen. But I can wait as long as you choose. I am very patient."

"Yes, you must wait. I can't talk connectedly in this wind: it blows all but the dregs of my thoughts into foam."

"I am afraid, to be very prosaic, that you are taking cold. But what are we to do? Walking is impossible, for you at least, until this hurly-burly subsides."

"I notice that your slang blows away too," said Barbara, with sudden humour.

"Oh, my slang is a garment," he answered. "Whenever I go swimming in very deep waters I leave it on the bank."

"How I love to swim It is one of the few out-of-door things I really care for."

"You must look superb with that dark-gold head of yours drenched. I should like to see you coming down a shadowy stream in this light, laughing that dirling laugh of yours, like a true water-kelpie. How the folks on the bank would screech and run!"

"I seem to suggest eerie names to you. First I am an elf-queen, then Amina, then a water-kelpie. But I do swim well. I can swim in surf. I am so strong. Feel."

"Gad! you have got a biceps!" said Dering, amazedly. "You are the most extraordinary mixture I ever knew. When you first came in that evening at Rosemary, I thought you just big and heavy: you didn't give me an idea of strength. Now you remind me of a war-goddess: your piled-up hair is like a helmet in this curious light. Look here: some day we'll go swimming together. I know the weirdest old garden in Italy; there's an enormous lake in it, lined with white marble; you can see the ripples like gold threads against the bottom on a moonlight night. I should like to see you with that water curling about you. How splendid those arms of yours would look dripping from wrist to shoulder! Ugh! what a great, golden, uncanny thing you are?"

"You must swim well yourself; don't you? A man should swim, and ride, and wrestle, and fence, as he breathes."

"I have always thought so," said Dering.

"How alike we are!"

This sentence always marks a distinct epoch in the acquaintance of a man and woman. The hands of friendship and love are drawn apart as by two passing trains, and friendship is left on the siding. These two turned their faces towards each other in the grim twilight, although they could now discern only a vague massed darkness where each was.

"Yes—more than you know," said Dering, concisely.

"I don't see how it is: you understand me before I speak."

"And you understand me after I speak—what is really much rarer."

The wind was now dying down. A fitful, whinnering gust occasionally shook the dry limbs above them, wailed up and down the road for a little space, fleered suddenly to leeward, and was still.

Dering rose and held out his hands to Barbara, who found herself on her feet, and almost against his breast at the same time. She withdrew a little hurriedly, and the darkness fell down

between them. They then groped their way stumblingly to a gate just above, and passed through together. Among the tall weeds on the comb of the hill, some stars were a-tremble like belated fireflies.

"There are your elfin maids of honour coming to find you," said Dering. "I can see the witch-fires in their caps."

"You see they don't know there is a mortal with me."

"Perhaps they mean that this mortal shall put on immortality."

"Don't!" said Barbara, shaken by one of the violent trembling-fits which had alarmed him earlier in the evening. "That's in the burial service. How can you speak lightly of such things? Oh, this has been a terrible, terrible walk!"

"Thank you," said Dering, gravely.

"Don't laugh,—don't laugh," she urged, grasping his arm with both hands. "Oh, why did you say that? I can see it all now! —that horrible, long church, like a vault itself, filled with leering, silly, curious faces—that mouthing man in his robes—the coffin—— Oh!"

"Barbara! Oh, you poor girl!" said Dering, with curdling pity. He put both arms about her, and she clung to him, gasping and trembling, in the desolation of night-blurred upland.

V.

DERING came to Rosemary the next day, and the next, but Barbara was not to be seen. For nearly a week she did not leave her room, and when she came down at last, drawn by the wooing of the warm November afternoon, which had in it some of the after-glow of summer, like the warmth left by young lips on those of the aged, she found Dering seated on the shallow stone steps of the old portico, playing with the greyhound pups. He put them aside as best he could, to greet her, and his eyes went deep into her eyes. He almost felt the moisture of that diving gaze; and then her lids fell, but his look remained upon her; and after a moment or so he began to think that she inspired him with imagination, such strange fancies stirred him when in her presence. This afternoon, notably, she seemed to him, in her grey gauze gown, like one of the mist-wreaths from that strange evening on

which he had last seen her, blown into this golden to-day—a pale cloud, in shape of a woman, which some far sunset had kissed in dying, leaving its light upon her hair.

As he rose to meet her, he noticed that she shrank, and, man-like, misinterpreted the motion. He thought it was the memory of their last walk together that caused that involuntary withdrawing, when it was in fact the unmournful character of the gown that she wore—an airy thing, held in place by an old silver girdle, and meant only for feminine eyes—as unwidow-like a garment as can be imagined; suitable perhaps for a young girl who mourns the death of her first kiss, but nothing more material. Her bright, smooth flesh glowed through the smoky folds, like Pleasure revealing herself through dreams.

Dering felt her beauty cling to him from head to foot, like a veil whose woof was fire, and whose warp mist. It thrilled and chilled him at the same time. Pale and aërial as was her dress, it was like a breath of cold air between them. He was reminded of some rich tropical flower, blooming behind the meshes of the Spanish moss.

All this passed through his mind in a whiff. His words were prosaic enough.

"I came to bring you a book," he said. "I suppose you'll laugh at me, and call me Browning-mad, but I like it awfully It's all scribbled up. I thought you were still ill, you know. I thought it might cheer you."

"No, I don't laugh at you. I like Browning. It takes courage to admit it, though: people always think one posing. It is almost as trying to acknowledge Browning as it is to acknowledge the Deity."

"Yes, isn't it? I wonder he acknowledges himself."

They laughed, Barbara with some nervousness.

"Suppose you come and sit here," said Dering, "and let us look over it together. This air will be like wine to you. I'll get that fur rug out of the drawing-room."

"Wait," said Barbara. "I am too chilly in this thin dress. While you get that I will ring for a cloak."

She rejoined him with a dark cloak drooping from her shoulders. With her Naiad-like attire hidden from sight, she felt more matronly and at her ease. He was really a boy to her, just her age within a week or two. She had heard of his every school and college escapade from her husband, and actually knew the names of two of his salad-day flames. She smiled at him in a

distinctly motherly way, as he seated himself beside her on the rug with those nestling movements which always amused her.

"I like you when you look like that," he said, pleasedly. "You've got an air of The Mother of Nations. Do you know you're a good bit like the Milo?"

"How very absurd!" said Barbara, but glowed with the inward satisfaction which always possesses flesh and blood on hearing itself compared to marble.

"Yes, you do. I used to think the Milo a big, lumpy woman; but she's the embodiment of grandeur to me now."

"I believe you thought me a big, lumpy woman at first?"

"Not lumpy—only too big. See here: I've got an odd trick of opening books at random: I'm going to open this for you before we begin reading. Now——"

She was interested, and leaned her head close to his over the opening book. His curls seemed to spring against her hair with a certain life of their own. She drew back, noticing it.

"What's the matter?" said Dering.

"Your hair—it seemed to move."

"Did it? I don't blame it. Look, this is for you:

> "God, that created all things, can renew!
> And then, though after-life to please me now
> Must have no likeness to the past, what hinders
> Reward from——"

"Stop!" said Barbara. She put her open hand on the page, shutting out the words, and he glanced up wondering, to see tha she was strangely pale—not a vestige of colour in lip or cheek. Under the bright up-springing of her strong hair, her face had the whiteness of a dove's wing against a flame-brown cloud.

"What's the matter?" he said, again.

"I don't like that sort of thing. It's ghastly. Please don't do anything like that ever again. I—I loathe the supernatural. I don't believe in it, of course, but I loathe it."

"I'm glad you think me supernatural. I'm beginning to think you are. At least, if you're not supernatural you're super-womanly. I never saw any one an atom like you. I wish you'd kindly tell me where I made a mis-cue that time?"

"Ah! your slang-garment. So you don't feel yourself swimming in deep waters this afternoon?"

"No—only wading. It's deepish, though. I will soon take refuge in naked English. I wish you'd tell me what's supernatural

in opening a book at random? If it hits, I call it a coincidence. I don't see how that could possibly have hit, I must say. I thought it decidedly a-gley. Was there any meaning in it? There must have been, to work you up so."

"Yes, there was," said Barbara, and again the blood rushed from her face. Dering looked at her rather curiously for a few seconds, and then held out the book.

"You open for me," he said.

"I told you I disliked the idea,"—then, with sudden contradiction, "I've done some wonderful things in that way myself."

"Why, do you open books too? We *are* alike, by Jove!"

"Yes, I open the Bible sometimes; but that's an old Methodist trick."

"Do open this now. I've a reason."

Barbara took the book from him into her gloveless hands, which were long, and slenderly firm, with perfectly-kept nails dashed here and there by little white flecks. Their touch lingered on the mental sense, as rare music does on the mental ear, being full of swift, tingling pulses, warm and elastic as some fruit—a man's touch to a woman—not quite human to a man. The hands of certain women are more subtly sweet of contact than the lips of others, and their very hair seems to breathe.

She hesitated, opened the book hastily with her face averted, and thrust rather than held it out to him.

"Shall I read what your finger marks?" said Dering.

"Yes."

"Just that one line?"

"Yes. It's probably something too deep for any one but Truth to dip up in her bucket."

"No, it isn't: it's Truth herself."

"Let me see."

They bent together again, then drew apart, but holding each other with varying eyes. The line ran,—

"I would love infinitely, and be loved."

He leaned forward after a while, pulled a blade of grass, and marked the place with it.

"It's awfully curious," he then said, tossing back on his folded arms among the grey fur—"most amazingly curious. I've just been passing through a phase of my life—which has been anything but an orthodox one, by the way—and last night I came to that conclusion. I think I would rather love infinitely, even without

being loved, than not love at all. I'm not a bit sentimental, I do assure you!" he supplemented, hastily, springing erect all at once. Her gravely laughing eyes reassured him.

"I never take remarks personally," she said; then, with a change of mental position as swift as had been his physical one, "Don't want to love!" she cried, leaning to him; "don't wish for it! I used to; I used to pray for it every night. Oh, it sounds heroic, and superb, and godlike, to say that you are willing to take sorrow along with love—grief in proportion to it. You would not, when the time came!—you would not! If we live we suffer. We had better be the coals of hell than the people they burn. And yet coals can't love, you know. Oh! I don't know what I'm saying!" She got to her feet and ran down the old steps, out into the dappled twilight.

Dering followed her. "Look here," he said: "you needn't ever be afraid I'll misunderstand you. It would be absolutely impossible—absolutely. Go on and talk just as crazily as ever you please. We're all crazy—every one of us—and the very craziest of all is the man who says he isn't."

"But don't want to love," repeated Barbara. "It isn't a romantic girl talking to you. I am a woman of twenty-six, and I know—I know it all. Whenever I think of it—whenever I lie awake at night and think of the whole weary thing, from first to last—I am so grateful, grateful, grateful that I never had a child. I used to long for one. Now I am so glad!—so glad! I have gotten up on bitter, winter nights in my thin night-gown, trembling all over with the cold, to thank God for that! At least I haven't that to answer for!"

"I know so well how you feel," said John Dering, gravely.

"Most women are never happy until they have a child, you know," she panted on; "and at first, at first I did long for something to remind—something that belonged—— Yes, yes, I did want a child of my very own; but now I tell you I can't thank God enough——"

She paused, expecting some words of remonstrance, and he said, in a voice which was as different as possible from his usual boyish tone,—

"If I were a woman I should feel just as you do."

"Oh, how good you are!—how you understand!" she cried, passionately, and reached him both her hands. He took them in his own strong, nervous young hands, which moved incessantly even while holding hers, and waited as if for her to go on.

"You are so good," she said, again.

"Why do women always persist in calling men good when they understand them? I honestly believe if Satan were to let a woman see, while she was roasting, that he comprehended her sufferings, she would say, 'How good you are!'"

"But you are good: no man who was not would listen so patiently and not sneer. I don't mean that you've never done anything wrong——"

"I hope not!"

"Nor ever will again——"

"Heaven forbid!"

"But you understand me."

"One has to be a bit good to do that," he put in, quickly and somewhat shyly. She moved impulsively towards him.

"I am so glad you like me!" she said. "It isn't quite so dreadful since you have come."

"You dear thing!"

"No, it isn't—it isn't. Do you know I can remember when I used to like to be alone? As a girl I liked it. Ugh! how we change! how we change!"

"Yes, we do," said Dering, feelingly.

"Will you stay to tea to-night? We can have it all to ourselves in the drawing-room, before that big fire. Aunt Fridis always sits in the library. I make such good tea. We can have the dogs in. It will be quite bright and cheerful, won't it? I think we'd enjoy a long talk over the fire. A wood fire always thaws my thoughts. We could roast some chestnuts, too."

"Nothing personal in that, I trust?"

"What do you mean? Oh! that disgusting slang! Never mind; you can say anything if you'll stay. But you will stay, won't you? Are you fond of music? I play very well,—really well, you know. Oh! I forgot there's no piano. Well, never mind: we can talk. Every time we talk together I feel I know you ten years better." She was hurrying on eagerly, feverishly, glancing every now and then over one shoulder or the other as at some haunting presence.

"I tell you what I'm going to do," said Dering, suddenly. "I'm going to make you come in the house this instant, and then you're to go upstairs and put on something warm—a tea-gown, if you have one. You are shivering all over, down to your finger-ends. And then you're to pull up to that big fire you spoke of and let me amuse you: that's what you're to do."

"Oh, how like Val!" she said, under her breath; "how like him!"

Dering turned a little sharply.

"What was that?" he said. "I didn't quite catch it, you speak so fast."

"Nothing," she assured him.

As they mounted the portico steps together he turned to her. "It has just come to me what you said, and I don't want you to mislead yourself. I'm not really in the least like my cousin; that is, except as far as looks go."

She caught at his arm to steady herself, and her tempestuous breathing frightened him a little.

"There," he said, "I'm a brute. If he was Valentine I'm certainly Orson." And he smiled with a grim humour.

"No, no, you're not," whispered Barbara. "Only you have yet to suffer."

"I don't know but what I have," said Dering, somewhat gloomily. And then she let him guide her into the dark drawing-room and unfasten her cloak.

VI.

As Barbara was about to leave the room, Dering came and put himself in her way.

"I wonder if you would think me insufferably cheeky if I were to ask you something?" he said, with a suggestion of embarrassment.

"I should say that it depended a good deal upon the something."

"Well, then, would you mind putting on a white gown?—that is, of course, if you change your gown. You don't mind, do you?"

"Mind? Mind putting on a white gown, or mind your asking me to?"

"Either—both."

"Not in the least."

"You *are* a dear thing!"

He reached out his hand impulsively, she placed here in it, and

they both laughed. She came back after a while, feeling rather too big in her loose gown of white China crape.

"I feel something as I fancy a statue does, when it is suddenly done into marble after having been in the clay for a long while. I feel aggressively white; and there is so much of me to put in white."

"Oh, well, there's a good deal of the Milo," said Dering.

"Yes, but even she dispensed with her arms."

They laughed again, Barbara afterwards sitting silent for some time, and filliping at the little silver bells which ornamented her handscreen. They were both looking in the fire, but Dering could see her from the side of his eye, and wondered how he could ever have thought her too big. It was like cavilling at the size of a flowering tree, he told himself. In reality Barbara would have been handsomer had there been less of her and her good looks thus more concentrated. As we grow older we like our creeds and slippers larger, our clubs and houris smaller.

Barbara was not in any way conscious of Dering, as she struck at the fringe of bells: she was merely thinking how sad and pitiful a thing it was that she would never again care what sort of garments she wore, so long as they covered her and attested that she was in her right mind. She could not imagine taking any interest in her attire. When a woman neglects her wardrobe, it is as when a man loses his interest in his cook. Like the proverbial straw, although of infinitesimal importance in itself, either fact will tell which way the wind of destiny is blowing. When the wardrobe and the cook flourish, then for the coast of joy: if they are overlooked, then for the islands of disillusion or sorrow. A woman's hair, however, is the final test. As long as she curls it she cannot be truly said to have resigned either soul or body to despair. Let the accustomed and becoming ringlets be brushed austerely back from brow and temples, then in truth is consolation an exile. Barbara's rich love-locks were yet curled above her straight brows.

If you had asked her, she would undoubtedly have replied that life to her was a burden to be borne, cheerfully or resignedly as the case might be. She would have smiled at any suggestion of future joy, as surely as she would have frowned to think that any one could deem her capable of ever again desiring earthly felicity. She would have told you that, to her, existence meant resignation and religion a great patience. Yet, strange as it may seem, beneath all this weight of gathered and dried twigs from the tree of a very

sorrowful knowledge, a tiny Hope rustled its yet incapable wings It was too small and just-born a thing to be conscious even of its own personality, much less to make Barbara acquainted with that fact. She perhaps felt the tickling now and then of its half-fledged pinions, but this sensation disturbed rather than pleased.

Dering, who was much in love with her already, was congratulating himself that at last he had found a woman, young, handsome, and intelligent, who would sincerely give and receive, the highest order of friendship. An old councillor had once said to him, "Young man, if you want a friend in a young woman, choose one who has had some great sorrow." Barbara had been the possessor of this required item; she, moreover, corresponded marvellously to his rather exalted ideal of womanhood. Among many future delights which he pictured as attendant upon their communion of soul, that of the letters which they would exchange was predominant. What charming letters he felt sure that she would write!—as easy and unconventional as the lines of the delightful garment which she now wore. What delicate humour would characterize them! what a subtle play of fancy! what quips and quirks of lighter moods! He could fancy those long, gracile fingers moving over the thin, white sheets which she would send him, the five rubies above her wedding-ring winking impishly from her other hand used to steady the paper. He seemed to follow these graceful hands from wrist to shoulder, from shoulder to throat; her bending face, illuminated by the white reflection from the paper, grew also on his sight. She would, perhaps, wear that dense yet filmy gown; in the privacy of her own apartment, she would have unbound the riotous masses of her copper-coloured hair; her delicate foot in its web-like stocking would be thrust in and out of her pretty bedroom slipper as thoughts and fancies crowded on her; she would doubtless have tossed other discarded garments on some chair in that charming room; the peeps of delicate lace from crumpled petticoats would be enchanting. She would——

"A penny," said Barbara—"two—three—even four. Your thoughts were so tremendous that you were literally glowering."

"I'm sure I couldn't have been glowering," said Dering.

"That leaves me to infer that they were pleasant thoughts."

"So they were."

"Oh! then I can have no hope of purchasing them. It is only disagreeable thoughts that are purchasable. How the wind blows!"

"Yes; it seems the signal for it to wake when we are together.'

"I am so glad you stayed! but I'm afraid your walk home will be very dreary."

"I will have those unsold thoughts."

"Cannot you give me some, even if you will not sell them?"

"Why, yes, I will. I was thinking what congenial friends we two are going to be. I was thinking what delightful letters you could write. I daresay you think me very presuming. Do you?"

"No," said Barbara. She let the handscreen fall with a little tinkle into her lap, and held up her laced fingers between the flames and her eyes.

"No," she said again, seriously, turning him her full face. "I do not see how you could even say that (because I'm sure you don't think it), after the way I've talked to you."

"If I had any doubts," replied Dering, "they are gone now."

"I am sure of it. I don't feel as though we would ever have a misunderstanding."

"Nor I."

"I do not see why people should ever quarrel. There are always stones in any road, but a skilful driver avoids them. This very road of friendship one can either jolt over it or be whisked smoothly along—counting idiosyncrasies as stones, of course."

"You must have been as strange a child as you are a woman," said Dering.

"I don't know," said Barbara. "All children are more or less strange, only grown people don't take the trouble to find it out. Childhood is rarely ever commonplace. Every child has at some time one thought original and startling enough to make its acquaintance a benefit. I remember once a child telling me that she thought 'hiccoughs must be prayers to the devil.' Did you ever hear of such an extraordinary idea?"

She had been hurrying on, partly from real interest in her subject, partly from a desire to be saying something.

Dering's absent-minded length of gaze gave her a slightly uncomfortable feeling. She was almost used now to his resemblance to her husband, and the dissimilarity of his spiritual self was beginning to impress her.

"I don't believe there ever was a woman the least like you," he said, finally, withdrawing his look.

"Oh," returned Barbara, "every man says that to every woman whom he particularly likes. It is the same thing as telling one's sweetheart that she is the only woman who ever really roused

one's whole nature, or that no man ever loved quite as one loves her—&c., &c., &c.

She rose and began to move up and down the room with the long, padding gait peculiar to her.

"You move like a panther," said Dering. "I can't keep my eyes off you."

"So I see," she answered, laughing somewhat nervously, and made as though she would sink into a chair.

"No, don't," he pleaded. "Do move about. I can feel how restless you are. When you walk with that crouching, suppressed pace, I can almost hear the jungle-grasses crackle back from your way. You do change so! Out in that wind you were like a witch thing—uncanny—all eyes and a blowse of red-gold hair. Then when I meet you sometimes walking, you are like a merry boy. Then you are like a shadow-woman: you were this afternoon in that thinnish grey gown. When you speak of Val you are like a beautiful, forlorn Peri. There! you have changed again—in a second! I never saw anything like it!"

She held out her clasped hands to him, as he rose and approached her.

"Please do not speak of—him," she said, in a strained undertone. "Please do not—ever again."

Dering paused where he was, and did not come any nearer her.

"I promise you," he said, "I will not."

VII.

BARBARA had by this time become quite accustomed to the fact of Dering's resemblance to her husband. True, an occasional trick of voice or gesture would arrest her with a sense of pained cognizance, but she was beginning to connect his personality also with himself, and these characteristic traits, having a twofold association, wounded her less and less. They were together more frequently and for a longer time as the days fled backward, and it became his regular custom to spend the evening at Rosemary. They were both bewitched by that sense of unworldliness which possesses men and women of the world when alone together in the country, and it seemed to them as though they could never voluntarily have mured themselves in labyrinths of brick and stone during these late autumn days, now discovered to be the most desirable of all the year.

It was on a bitterly cold, grey afternoon in November that these two comrades, as they now called themselves, were engaged in a game of "graces" in the large central hall at Rosemary. The earlier day had been tempestuous and clattering with wind-whirled sleet, but a tawny cloud, that in streaming wildness resembled, perhaps, the flying mane of one of the Prophets fiery steeds when in mid-heaven, now streaked all the upper sky and sent a gold-red light glowing in at the hall windows. There were eight of these, tall, shrouded shapes, like uncased mummies, and where the faces should have been, that furnace-like radiance shone through folds of sheer muslin.

The figures of Barbara and Dering were revealed as by a gilded mist, while they swooped with elastic movements among the shadows, here and there, which glittered as with mica. Now the rathe arm and throat of Barbara came into bright relief against the dusky formlessness, now it was Dering's gay crest of curls and straining shoulders. The orange-ribboned hoops circled above, like two haloes uncertain as to which of those handsome heads they were to saint.

Barbara suddenly caught one of the bright rings on her arm and let it run up to her shoulder.

"You are not tired?" said Dering.

"Only of this especial amusement. Look! you cannot catch that before I do!" She sent the grace-hoop spinning down the long hall as she spoke, and leaped out after it. Dering was almost as quick. They met hustledly in the gloom at the farther end of the house, and both seized the hoop at once.

"I touched it first!" said Barbara.

"No, I!" declared Dering.

"Indeed, indeed, I did!" persisted she.

"Indeed, indeed, you didn't!" he returned, mockingly.

"I will have it, at all events," said Barbara.

"Oh, if you want a tussle——" replied Dering.

Of all delightful autumnal experiences, a romp in a big country hall towards twilight is the most exhilarating. Barbara and Dering wrangled like a boy and a girl over the grace-hoop. She was as evasive in her sudden dives and twistings as a dream-woman. Their breath came hurriedly, and they began to pant and laugh together. Dering was almost winning, when some small object tinkling on the bare floor attracted their attention. Barbara suddenly released the grace-hoop and rushed forward.

"You are welcome to your prize!" she called, pausing under one of the windows to examine her find. "I have often longed to see what you have in this locket. Now I will punish you for cheating. I will find out who your sweetheart is, and I will never again give you any peace!"

"Jove!" said Dering, "was that my locket? Come, Barbara, honestly—don't look at that, please; I really ask you."

Barbara's reply was to press a little nearer the window, and curl her lips inward in her effort to separate the close rims of the small gold case in her hands. Dering came up behind her, and unceremoniously took both hands and locket into a tight grasp. This locket contained nothing more sentimental than an absurd photograph of Valentine Pomfret, taken when the two were at college together—one of those deformed caricatures which one sometimes sees, and which consist of a Brobdingnagian head on a Liliputian body. Dering, by this time, knew enough of Barbara's morbid sensitiveness to dread the effect which the sudden sight of this photograph might have upon her.

"I tell you I'm not joking," he said.

"Nor I. There's no use trying to bully me. You know I'm nearly as strong as you are. If you want another tow-row, all right."

This time the scuffle was wordless and somewhat earnest.

"I don't want to hurt you," said Dering, finally.

"Don't alarm yourself. I'll stand any amount of mangling to gain my end."

"You know I seriously mean to get that from you."

"So do I to see it."

"I simply can't hurt you," said Dering, a little desperately, "but I must have it. Why won't you see I am in earnest?"

"Why won't you see I am?"

"But such an ado over a little thing!"

"That's what I've been thinking."

"Barbara——"

"It is my name."

"I give you your last chance. It's an antique resort, but if you don't give me that locket I'll—I'll kiss you!"

"What a truly terrible threat!"

"You don't believe it; but I will, I tell you. I should think you might see that I've some real reason for not wishing you to see that locket."

"How deeply penetrating men are! As if that were not the very reason that I wanted to see it!"

"You understand, then, that I really mean to kiss you if you don't give it up? Really I do."

"Do you?" said Barbara. She escaped him by a sudden flashing movement, and rushed down the now almost absolutely dark hall, impelled by that delightful feeling of scared uncertainty which precipitates children down a long staircase, past darkling coignes where clutched fingers are waiting to grasp a loitering ankle.

She dashed into the as yet lampless dining-room, doubled through a little corridor, and rushed back on her own traces, laughing gaspingly to think how she had escaped him. As she darted through another door back into the dining-room, she found herself almost in Dering's arms. Even then, however, he did not secure her: she escaped once more, and fled into a dark little closet to the left, mistaking it, alas! in her excitement, for a corresponding door of exit. Dering followed her at once. She gave a kind of laughing cry, like a hysterical child, and flattened herself against the wall, thrusting the locket behind her; but, catching her about the waist, he drew her forward, feeling for the locket with his other hand. He might as well have tried to open a boy's fist. She bent from him, and made, this time, an

altogether ineffectual attempt to get away. Dering, rather out of patience, stooped down; she turned her head, a little frightened, and her lips brushed his—a touch light as flower-leaves, fine as fire. In another instant both mouths had clung into a kiss.

A great mental blow annihilates memory, just as it is annihilated by a great physical blow. Neither Barbara nor Dering recalled how they came to be grouped before the dining-room fire, he leaning back in a low arm-chair, she crouching with her hand-hidden face against his knee. All about them was a winter's silence, broken only by the ticking of Dering's watch and Barbara's long-drawn, sobbing breaths. It seemed to him as though cold rills of wind were playing up and down his limbs, while the chair in which he sat, together with himself and Barbara, rose towards the ceiling, leaving the floor at a great distance beneath. He looked far into the hot core of the fire, thence down at the smooth curve of the head of his cousin's wife, thinking how like were its shining strands of hair to the threads on a reel of silk, and grasping more firmly the handles of the chair in which he sat, in order to refrain from touching that winning lustre with his finger-ends.

Barbara's breath returned upon her face from the cloth of Dering's trousers. She saw the fire-red in blurred lines between her fingers, and put some meaningless words to the ticking of his watch, fantastically likening it to an echo of his heart, which rapped hurriedly above. She seemed to see through the top of her head his set face, unusual in its fierce pallor, and with eyes gleaming as she had remembered them for that instant when they had flashed into hers over that eager kiss. The fire seemed a conscious presence to her, and its flames appeared to leap and cognizantly peer between her hiding fingers, until she felt almost as though inquisitive eyes were upon her. It was certain that she thought of everything but her present situation. She was kneeling upon a wrinkle in the hearth-rug, and, feeling that it chafed her knees, was reminded of the Persian prayer-rugs, and so of the desert, and so of the dreary possibilities which would be included for a woman during a prolonged ride on camel-back. She wondered if Dering had ever mounted upon one of those picturesquely-distorted beasts, and was inclined to laugh when she found that she had forgotten whether it was in one of their many stomachs or in their humps that they carried the supply of water which prevented them from suffering of thirst on their long journeys.

Dering, in the meanwhile, became also the victim of a profound and

ghastly desire to laugh. The corners of his mouth twisted eyeward in a mirthless and distorted grin which would have inexpressibly horrified Barbara had she chanced at that moment to glance up. He controlled this risible phenomenon by a violent effort, however, and resumed his grim stare into the fire, venturing after a while to pass a somewhat uncertain hand over her bending head.

"No, no," whispered Barbara.

"I beg your pardon," he said, earnestly. "I won't touch you again. I only want to do what you wish."

She murmured something which he had to bend down to hear and even then did not quite catch.

"It shall be just as you say," he remarked, at a venture.

"You are so good," she whispered back.

"But what must I do? I leave it all to you. Must I go away? I'll go abroad, if you wish it. I'll—I'll go to India: I've always wanted to go to India. I'll send you some tiger-skins—um—that's too commonplace, eh? What was it Isaacs sent his sweetheart? Tiger-ears, wasn't it? I'll send you some tiger-ears."

"How can you joke about it?" cried Barbara.

"I really don't know," replied Dering, sorrowfully. "Reaction, I suppose."

"Oh, it's all so dreadful!—so dreadful!" came the smothered tones from his knees.

"No, I won't agree to that," he answered, firmly.

"Oh, but you must. It's the least that we can do."

"What is? to think it all dreadful?"

"Yes, all of it—*all*."

"Well, I just simply can't. It may be a want of refinement, or high feeling—I suppose one could find lots of names for it—but I honestly can't feel that, you know."

"Oh," said Barbara, "I'm sure you will. When you are by yourself—in the dark—quite alone—you—you will see how awful it has all been from first to last."

"No," returned Dering, "I know I won't. You had better make up your mind to that. If you're disappointed in me, it's no more than I am in myself."

"And me," said Barbara.

"In you? *Darling!*" he breathed, tearing the fringe on the rather rickety old chair which held him, in the effort not again to touch her. "How can you say such things to me?"

"Oh, I haven't said one-third that I ought—that I mean to. You *must* be disappointed in me: you cannot help it. It's—it's

almost a duty; yes, it's a sacred duty. Disappointed in me! you must *despise* me!"

"That's utter nonsense!" said Dering, in a matter-of-fact tone, which sounded as incongruously among the wailing harmonies of her self-reproachful voice as would a penny trumpet among the andante ripples of the Moonlight Sonata.

"I'm glad you can look on it in that way," answered Barbara, stiffly—if one can be said to do anything stiffly when one is limply huddled against another's knee. "Yes, I—I am really glad of that," she added, with less certainty.

"Why, of course it's nonsense," said Dering, stoutly. "When *you* are alone in the dark *you* will see that." All at once he succumbed to a sudden, sweeping passion. "'Alone in the dark,'" he repeated, leaning down his arms heavily upon her, and gathering the rich folds of her gown in his hands. "Barbara, you need never be that again."

"What?" she said, huskily, longing to hear the words she knew he would utter in reply, and yet loathing herself for so longing. "What?"

"Alone in the dark," said Dering, tensely; and she felt his quick breath glow among the fibres of her hair as his lips brushed them in speaking. She cringed shivering beside him a moment longer, and then got to her feet and hurried away from him to a distant chair. When he followed her and bent over her, she shrunk down from him, putting up her open hands between them.

"It is what I must be forever," she whispered, shakenly—"always—always—always!"

"No," said Dering. He took her protesting hands in his, and laid his lips first to one palm and then to the other.

"I tell you yes!" she said, passionately, her stormy bosom tossing some little diamond pins that she wore into iridescent sparkles—"yes, and yes, and yes!"

Then she took his face into both hands for an instant, and held it near her own.

"We are both mad, I think," she said.

"Mad if we persist in calling simple joy madness."

"I have no right to joy."

"But I have. Will you deny me that right?"

"If it must come through me, yes."

"It must come through you, and I say no."

"We are both very obstinate," she said, in a tired voice.

"There you are perfectly correct," answered Dering.

"But I will conquer."

"There you are entirely wrong."

"Yes, wrong in everything. There *you* are right. Oh, do you suppose I do not suffer?" she cried, with sudden bitterness. "I have no words to tell you what I suffer."

"Nor I," he said.

She rose, and stood for an instant unyielding in his embrace.

"You are a man," was her final reply. "You have not the complex feelings that tear a woman. And you are responsible only to yourself. You have never"—she paused a moment, looking at him—"you have never been married. You do not know what it is to hear a dead voice ever in your ears, to feel always a dead hand claiming you. You do not know what it is to sin against the dead. The dead," she repeated, glancing dreadingly about her.

"Barbara!" said Dering; but she escaped him.

She rushed from him towards the half-open door, her stretched-forth arms repulsing him as he advanced.

"No, no! never!" she whispered. "There is a grave between us—there is an open grave between us."

VIII.

DERING did not seem to himself to walk back to the house at which he was stopping. He had that sensation of gliding along without volition, a foot or two above the ground, which we have all experienced in dreams, and his down-bent eyes were not conscious of the dreary glisten that the winter moon struck from the wet, dead leaves about his feet. There was of course no fire in his room when he reached it, and the cold was intense; but he undressed in the same species of stupor, only rousing for a moment when in trying to brush out his thick curls he discovered that the water into which he had plunged them had frozen. He then managed to kindle a small fire with some bits of light-wood and an old sporting gazette, kneeling down before the brief blaze, his discarded coat held by the sleeves about his neck in lieu of a dressing-gown. It was slow work, thawing that thick mass of heavily-curling locks, and he threw on more wood, still retaining his crouching posture. As the heat increased, he was conscious of an elusive, subtle perfume, which escaped and returned as will a remembered face; and all at once he became aware of its origin. It was that exquisitely fresh fragrance which sponges and some women share in common—a smell of wild grasses and the sea—of a woman's hair daily washed—in a word, of Barbara. For the few moments in which he had held her in his arms, her head had leaned against his breast. It was this delicate perfume of her hair which the fire was now drawing from the cloth of his coat.

He rose and plunged into bed, giving a great, boyish shudder as the cold sheets settled down about him. His coat he had thrown from him, and he lay watching it now where it sprawled in a dark heap near the fire-lit hearth. He longed to experience again that faint, intoxicating odour, but something withheld him: it was like retaining some spiritual portion of her against her will, and Dering's pride was only exceeded by his honesty. He was bewildered as yet, and could form no distinct idea of his position in regard to her, though of one thing he was sure,—namely, that he had no right to think of her as a lover of his lady. Her morbid insistence about the dead had not at all affected him, but

she had repulsed his embrace, not yielded to it, and he would not in imagination take into his arms a woman who in reality refused to remain within them. He was a man of few but thorough creeds, and chief of these was a belief, consistently carried out, which ran to the effect that a man's thoughts should be as respectful to a chaste woman as were his actions. He knew the power of perfume over the fancy, and he knew that self-control consists chiefly in retaining the bolt in its braces, not in slipping it out and then thrusting one's arm in its place. He lay quite still, shivering violently and endeavouring to fix his mind on commonplace things. It occurred suddenly to him that he had not said his prayers, which he did with the same sweet, clean, boyish regularity with which he plunged daily into cold water. These prayers varied. They were sometimes very long, sometimes merely a word or two—never pre-arranged, and having reference to anything that might come into his head: thus, for several nights past he had included an ailing Irish setter in his petitions. He was a being of vast and warm affections, and sometimes asked happiness for those whom he most loved, taking a certain pleasure in whispering their names into his locked palms. To-night his orisons ran as follows: "Dear God, make Jock a good boy, and bless my father and mother, and everybody. Amen." Then he jumped into bed again, unconscious that he had repeated the very words of his childhood prayers, and seeing Barbara's face advance and retreat on the waves of darkness, like a sea-tossed flower. He thrust out his arms with a fierce, vehement gesture towards it, shutting his teeth until there was a sharp ringing in his ears, and whispering imperiously behind them, "Love me—*love me.*"

Barbara, in the meanwhile, had also undressed mechanically; that is, she had cast aside her gown, and unloosened her ridgy hair, letting the hair-pins fall one by one upon the carpet, as she took them out. Then she drew the glittering lengths together with both hands, and stood staring at her reflection in the glass. Presently a strange smile broke the stillness of her face.

"Um—we know each other," she said, addressing her mirrored self—"we know each other, you and I, but only we two. You really have a good face—yes, really a good face—yes, a pure face. It's pure, I say. Look at your eyes—such a clear, dark brown—honest, deep, truthful—real dog-eyes. And then your mouth's very fine—such little, deep, cool, high-bred corners. I like to look at you; yes, you're very nice to look at, my good girl. Um—you smile so complacently, I don't think I'll pay you

any more compliments. I think I will tell you what you really are—what I see behind all that—what your—husband sees! Oh, I know your name. You are called Barbara Pomfret—Barbara Pomfret—Barbara Pomfret. Your husband's name was Valentine Pomfret. You married Valentine Pomfret. He is dead, but his name is not dead: it is alive in you. Your name is Barbara Pomfret." She leaned forward here until her breath made a little triangular blur on the clear glass. "There's another name for you, too," she said. "It is——Wanton!" The word seemed to stab her as though someone else had uttered it.

"O God!" she cried, falling to her knees, "help me! Dear God, help me! Hold me. Let him come to me, just a minute—just a minute: I'll pay for it in any way; I'll be so patient afterwards. Val, Val, come! Be disobedient, be blasphemous, be anything; only come to me one instant. You needn't even speak. Just let me see you—you, your very self.

"Oh! oh! I forgot! He would curse me; he would ask you to curse me. I have desecrated myself. Oh, if that kiss had only burned off my lips! Oh, can't I die? Won't you let me die? Won't you let me die? Ah, let me die! You won't hear! If there was only someone to ask for me—someone you loved. Oh, if Christ's mother asks you, won't you hear her? Dear Mother of Christ, pray for me—plead for me! You have been a woman—a woman like me!—like me!"

She fell upon the floor and writhed and sobbed until the boards vibrated beneath her agonized movements. Her feverish breath enveloped her face in a steam from her tear-drenched hair, as it had once before enveloped it that evening, and her face and lips were smarting and scalded by the hot drops ever gushing. In the midst of all this torture, she put out one of her burning hands and began to stroke her own half-bare shoulders, with soothing, gentle movements.

"Oh, you poor thing," she sobbed, strangling, "if I could only comfort you!—if one could only comfort one's self!" And then the horrible silent convulsions of despair and grief renewed themselves.

It was not until a full hour had passed that she rose, or made any effort to compose herself. At the length of that time, however, she kneeled up, and began gathering her soaked and tangled hair from about her face, to which a net-work of bright strands clung moistly. Her under lip was drawn against her teeth every now and then by a struggling breath, heavy with tears as a gust of summer wind with thick rain. These shuddering

breaths recurred at regular intervals, and were as though she were trying to force herself to swallow some noxious draught while her throat ached asthough she had been guillotined and was conscious of the wound. She got to her feet finally, swerved a moment, and stood erect, looking about her with a just-born resolve then she moved to the fire, which had glowered down in crimson rifts among a crust of white wood-ashes, and spread out her hands to its glow, at the same time looking up to the shadowy ceiling. Her wretched face, glazed with tears, borrowed colour from the rich coals, so that as she kneeled, staring upward, with large, distended eyes, she seemed like the Priestess of Fever presiding over her altar-fires.

It was only a few moments, however, before she rose again, and passed from the warm room out into the dark and draughty hall without, where the watery moonlight fell in oblong shapes upon the floor of waxed oak. This bleak and waning light only served to confuse her, and, shutting her eyes, she felt her way with extended hands, until her palms came in contact with the carving on a chest to one side. Opening this chest, she filled her arms with some soft draperies, and returned to her room, locking the door after her. She lighted the small silver Pompeiian lamp that swung from the canopy-rail of her bed, and this wan radiance fell down in languid uncertainty upon the kneeling woman, and the mass of crushed white satin and lace with which her arms were filled. This mass she extended upon the silken coverlet, touching its folds into place with a soft and gentle reverence, and spreading above it the veil of delicate tulle. She then took from her throat the gold miniature case which contained her husband's likeness, and, opening it, laid it down upon the sheening folds before her. Next she deliberately drew off her fur-lined dressing-gown and slippers.

The fire was now a mere pale blur here and there in the dark chimney-place, and a cold, bitter and intense, pervaded the room, while outside the wind rose a little and then dropped abruptly like a thing too heavy for its wings.

In the strong draught which passed from one loosely-hung door to the other, the silver lamp swung to and fro, changing the shadows in the satin folds underneath, and seeming to strike sparks from Barbara's bending head.

All night she kneeled there, clad only in her night-dress of thin cambric. The dreary winter sounds outside seemed not to disturb her. Now one heard the clash of ice-coated twigs in the fitful

gusts, now the crisp sound of some hoofed thing as it broke through the frost-rime matting the dead grass. Now a shutter clapped forward and then back again, startling the house-dog to dismal barkings, or an owl screamed its desolate tremolo, first close at hand, then flying farther off, as though to imitate an echo.

IX.

A WHOLE week passed before he saw her again, and then it was only by accident. He had walked over to Rosemary as usual, and, on being told of Barbara's absence, had decided to strike out across the fields on his homeward way, rather than take that monotonous tramp along the frost-roughened roads. As he swung himself over the low grey fence at the back of the stables into the brown and neglected field beyond, he felt as though he were becoming part of some cleverly-executed water-colour. The sweeps of ragged hill-side, undefined and vaguely dark in the winter twilight, seemed as though roughly washed in sepia, and their tall weeds bristled at top against a wall of clear, chrome yellow ribbed with scarlet.

The broad backs of some huddling sheep caught here and there a faded reflection, and the hurried tinkling of the bell on the neck of a homeward-driven cow broke the cold stillness. At the bottom of the field an ice-coated brook pursued its sluggish way, and Dering paused to break off some slivers of the ice and transfer them to his mouth—a boyish trick which he could never resist. As he stood erect, after accomplishing this somewhat slippery feat, he saw a tall figure about ten yards farther off, on the opposite side of the stream, motionless, beside a half-burned brush fire. The pale smoke-spiral curled slowly up beyond, seeming to encircle her in its mystic whorl.

In an instant he was beside her and had her hands in his. She caught her breath sharply, but made no exclamation, and they stood searching each other's faces in the feathery light.

He spoke first, excited and breathless: "You—you? Why have you tried to hide from me? You cannot: it is useless. You see?" And he drew her towards him as he spoke; but she was

as rigid and unyielding as a figure of iron: in truth, her heavy black garments, seen in this reddish-grey light, resembled draperies of that sombre metal.

"Let my hands go! let my hands go!" she said to him.

For answer he lifted first one and then the other to his lips, She felt their warm clinging through her thick gloves, but this rich sensation only served to fix her in her austere determination.

"I will not," she said; and, drawing herself haughtily away to the whole length of her long arms, she repeated, in a tone which she had caught from him, and behind her closed teeth, "*I will not.*"

"'Words—words—words,'" said Dering.

He released her hands, took her in his arms, and crushed her to him by main force.

"You see?" he said, again.

"That is nothing. It is nothing, I tell you. You are a man, and your body is stronger than mine; but your will is not; no, your will is not."

"You think so?" whispered Dering, with his lips against her ear. His breath streamed down her cheeks in among the black furs at her throat, thrilling her to the quick, and she began to pant frantically.

"You are cruel," she said, repulsing him as best she could. "All men are cruel. You are like the rest. You are cruel."

"No," replied Dering, "it is not I who am cruel. It is you. You are cruel to yourself."

"I want to be! I want to be!"

"You are cruel to yourself, but you are far crueller to me."

"I must be. I must be punished through you."

"You must be punished through no one."

"I tell you I must. I have asked God to punish me. I asked Him all one night on my knees, in the cold, with nothing on but my thin night-gown. You remember that night last week—*that* night? The thermometer went to zero. That was the night I asked Him."

"You are mad!"

"No, no, I'm not; I wish I were!"

"Perhaps it will help you to drive *me* mad? Will it?"

"I said you were cruel. Oh, women could not say such things to—to those who—to those they cared for."

"Well, never mind, then. I don't suppose either of us know

exactly what we are saying. Look here; you're not near warmly enough dressed."

"I have on fur," she said, putting her hand to her throat with a certain guilty timidity.

"Um—yes, a little strip around your neck," replied Dering, unconvinced. "But this jacket is the same one you used to wear all those warm October days. You see I remember."

"I am warm enough," she answered, through chattering teeth.

"Oh, if you insist, certainly," he said. Then there fell a silence between them.

"How pretty that is!" she ventured at last, disturbing the brush-ashes with the toe of her boot. The coals glared in red strips through the delicate white rime, like the core of some flaming fruit through its outer husk; here and there little wavering corkscrew films went melting upward.

"Very pretty," muttered Dering, absently. All at once he whirled about, and caught her again in his arms. "Here," he said, "tell me the truth here—breast to breast, heart to heart, life to life. I know that morbid thought that haunts you. Put it away. Do you hear? I command you. I am your lover. You hear? I command you to stop thinking those awful, ghoulish thoughts. No, don't struggle—please don't. Dear—so dear—let me tell you what I found last night in my prayer-book. It's one I'm awfully fond of: my favourite sister gave it to me—the lame one, you know, who died. I was thinking about her, and how she used to help me and love me, and I felt as though she were telling me where to turn, and then I put my finger on these words: 'The living—the living shall praise Thee, O Lord.' There, darling, that's it—'The *living*.' Don't you see? Why, it was just like a message—just like a word from God Himself. 'The *living*,' Barbara—'the *living!*'"

"Have pity!" she cried, hoarsely, clinging to him. "Mercy! have mercy!"

There were great, scalding tears in his eyes. "Oh, darling," he said, "you ask me that?—when you haven't any mercy on yourself? Oh, you poor darling! For heaven's sake, Barbara, look on this thing rationally, humanly, as we were meant to look on such things. Why, darling, think of it! he's not your husband now: he's a spirit—an essence; no more than that smoke curling up at our feet. There! there! I'm a clumsy brute. Oh, I wish to God God would help me!"

Neither of these frantic creatures caught, in this despairing appeal, that touch of humour which grief, in certain moments of necessity, will invariably borrow from mirth. They grasped each other, trembling violently and feeling the earth wave beneath their feet like a shaken carpet.

Dering was the first to speak.

"Don't cry like that," he urged. "I can't stand it; I simply can't stand it. Darling, you will drive us both crazy! Oh, why can't you see it all as clearly and blessedly as I can? Barbara, it was meant to be; it was, darling, I know it was. Look here: I didn't mean to come to Virginia this autumn: I was going to Canada with a friend of mine; and he fell through a trap at a theatre and got awfully hurt, and so of course we couldn't go. And then—look here, dear, please listen—please don't cry like that. Look; this will seem funny to you—it's got a ghastly sort of fun in it—but I had taken a dislike to you without seeing you. Honestly, dearest, I had. I made Va—I mean I made some one awfully angry once by telling them I thought your photograph looked coarse. Think of it! I said I thought you looked coarse! My darling—darling—*darling!*"

She shuddered afresh, pressing closer to him, and at the same urging him from her.

"It's what I am," she muttered, brokenly.

"What is?" demanded Dering, startled; then, as her meaning flashed on him, violently indignant. "You seem to take a sort of delight in saying that sort of thing to me," he cried. "You know it's false. You know the very idea's ridiculous. You know I only told you because I thought it might take you out of yourself, it was so perfectly ridiculous. Barbara! *stop* crying."

"Oh, let me!—let me!" she whispered, with a beseeching movement of her whole figure.

"Why, certainly, if it comforts you, my poor dear," he said, stroking all of her hair that he could reach beneath her close hat. To this she replied by a wail of absolute despair.

"Nothing will ever comfort me again," she cried; "and if it could I ought not to want it to."

"My own girl, I wish I could make you see how morbid you are."

"How can you call it morbidness?" she said, suddenly releasing herself. "Suppose you—had—been—my—husband. Would you want me to forget?"

He noticed the same apprehensive, backward glance that followed any mention of her husband. It touched him with a horrified and gushing tenderness, and he spoke under its warm impulse. He took both her hands, crossing one above the other, and pressing them convincingly between his own as he talked. "Listen: let me tell you how I would have felt," he said. "I would have felt that anything, anything which could add to your happiness while on earth would have my blessing. Any true, honest, unselfish man would feel so. I'm sure that it's just the way he felt."

He was astonished at the stricken cry which broke from her, as she tore her hands away and faced him with tumultuous bosom.

"Then you don't love me!" she cried. "You don't know what love is. You could never say that if you really loved me. It's hideous. You would never understand. Oh, it makes me wild to see how calmly you stand there! You don't know. Men never know. They never really suffer. They get over things so. Their memories are like—like photographs—they fade out so. Women's memories are like statues: you may break them in pieces, you may leave them out in storms until they are all discoloured, you can always put them together again. No matter how stained they are, they always retain their shape. It is our greatest curse. Yes, it is a curse upon us. We can't forget! we can't forget!"

She threw herself forward on her knees among the thick, tangled grasses, and took her face into her desolate-looking, black-gloved hands. Dering stood staring down upon her, helpless, almost hopeless.

"There's nothing I can say," he ventured at last, in a broken voice.

"No, there's nothing—there's nothing," she said. "If I could forget, there might be something. It's that awful distinct recollection that I have of everything. Why, I can see him now—I can hear him. I can see him lighting his cigar, coming home in the dusk. I can see the very streaks of light on his hat-brim and between his fingers, and the dead golden-rod stalks looking all pinched and grey about our feet. I can hear him say, 'Look out! *there's* a man-trap!' as he caught his foot in a tangle of grass. I can see the way he used to go about looking for a comfortable chair, with his cigar in one hand, and a book folded over his fore-

finger. I can see him making tea for me when I was ill, and burning his fingers, and dancing about with pain—ha! ha! ha! He was so absurd sometimes! Oh, Val! Val!" she ended, with a perfect shriek of desolation.

Dering felt as though she had thrust her hand into his breast and was twisting his heart-strings about with her strong, supple fingers, as he had seen her twist the greyhound puppies' ears. At that moment nothing appeared of much consequence. He thought mechanically that he would go out shooting to-morrow, and wondered if the Irish setter would have recovered sufficiently to accompany him.

Suddenly she stretched up to him two feeble, appealing hands. "Let us go home," she said, wearily. "I am so tired. I feel so ill."

He put a gentle arm about her, and she leaned heavily against him as they passed on through the overgrown field, the wild-rose brambles catching against her sorrowful skirts and pulling them backward every moment or so. It was too dark to distinguish anything save the gaunt net-work of the trees against the lowering sky, and the dark jutting of the stable-roof and the tall chimneys of Rosemary.

X.

BARBARA, who lay awake nearly all that night, had been sleeping restlessly for about an hour, when Rameses awakened her. Her method of rousing her mistress was somewhat unique, and consisted in kneeling down by the bed and keeping her large, circular eyes upon those of Barbara. On this occasion she had prefaced this performance by propping an envelope against the pillow, and as her mistress awoke she pushed it towards her with one slender brown finger.

"What is it? A letter? Is it time for the post? Have I slept so late?" asked Barbara, hurriedly. Then she saw that there was no stamp on the envelope, and recognized Dering's handwriting.

"Open the closet door a little," she said, and, leaning on her elbows among the tumbled bed-clothes, she read the note in the chink of light admitted through the window of the closet. Its contents were brief, and ran as follows:

"I am going to New York on the first afternoon train. I will not come to Rosemary again to torture and worry you. I understand perfectly. Never think that I misjudge you. Could you scratch me just a word or two to take with me? Or send me a marked book—one that you have marked, of course. If you need me or want to see me at any time, you have only to telegraph Manhattan Club. I will send you my address if I go abroad. I am afraid this is an unearthly hour to rout you up, but I have to leave on a very early train to make connection at Charlottesville, and I feel selfish enough to put you to a little inconvenience when I think of those awful hours of waiting in that village, and how a note or book from you would help me out.

"Yours,

"J. D."

Barbara put back her tangled hair, and looked up at Rameses out of eyes heavy with tears and sleep.

"Who brought this? Is he waiting?" she demanded.

"Yease'm, he's a-waitin'. 'Tis Unc' Jim's boy Granville."

"Well, then, give me some paper, and a pencil, and a book to write on."

She wrote the following note, still lying down in bed, and leaning first to one side and then the other, as her arms began to tingle numbly with the strain:

"If you would like, come over at two o'clock and I can drive you to Charlottesville in time for the 6.30 Express, and then you won't have any waiting to do. If not, write me again, and I will send the book you wish to the station. I thank you with all my (she had written 'heart,' then scratched it out elaborately and put a very distinct 'power' after it) power for your kindness to me always.

"BARBARA."

The signature also showed signs of fluctuation. It had first been "Yours ever, B. R. P.," then "As ever," then merely "B.," and finally a rather infinitesimal "Barbara"—as though she were trying to express a whisper in writing by the smallness of her chirography.

The reply to this missive came shortly—a telegraphic formula of ten words:

"Will be at Rosemary 2 sharp. You are so good. J."

When Rameses had prepared her bath, and thrown wide all four of the large windows, Barbara saw that it was raining gently but constantly. The whole lawn had a sodden, unkempt appearance, and some plough-horses that had strayed into the enclosure glistened dismally. The roads would be in a frightful state, and she thought with a palpable shudder of her long, dreary, companionless homeward drive that evening. She decided that she would not trust herself to be her own charioteer on such a gloomy night, and had recourse to the heretofore despised "carry-all" and "Unc' Joshua."

Dering was punctual to the second, and they set off at ten minutes past two, half smothered in the fur carriage robes with which Miss Fridiswig had heaped them.

It was still raining as they drove out upon the high-road, but with less steadiness, and the mists upon the hills, which were of a dark, soaked purple, had lifted, and hung in dissolving wreaths here and there above the rich slopes. Beauregard Walsingham rode behind to open gates, and Unc' Joshua had the front seat of the carry-all to himself, slipping about at particularly uneven bits

in the road, with a creaking sound of damp leather. This carriage was perhaps twenty years old, and rattled in more places than one could imagine it possible for a vehicle of any description to rattle, —filling up the gaps in Dering's and Barbara's somewhat spasmodic conversation, as Feuillet says the noise of Paris fills up the gaps in a Parisian's life.

He had told her perhaps ten times of her goodness in driving with him to Charlottesville, for the same number of times she had replied that it was only a pleasure, and they had admired in every variety of language every variety of tone in the dense grey air about them, when he turned abruptly to her.

"How I will miss you!" he said, in a strangled voice, and then twice, back of his teeth, in that way he had, and speaking in French for fear of Unc' Joshua, "Je t'aime!—*je t'aime!*"

"No, no," she whispered, bracing herself away from him by means of her hand against his knee under the fur robes. He drew off his gloves and held it there, his pulses throbbing riotously, his eyes on hers.

"Don't look at me," she said, with some confusion. "It is so light."

"I believe I could see your eyes in the dark, like a tiger's."

"Don't talk so loud. He hears every word. They understand a great deal more than you think. Oh, what a wonderful tone of red that field is! Why, it has a bloom on it like a grape."

"Yes—lovely lovely. Leave your hand there, please."

"I never—really, I never dreamed of such a colour. And, oh, that broom-field beyond, with the dark patches! And the belt of black woods! Oh!"

"Yes, and that ragged blue line beyond. What is that? Is it the Blue Ridge? No, don't take it away—not yet."

"Yes, that's the Blue Ridge. I wish we could see it from Rosemary. But you should drive through all this in June."

"Well, why shouldn't I? I mean to. Look: I have something to ask you. It isn't much. Look: I just want to take off your glove. May I?"

"No," she said, drawing short, difficult breaths; "no. How can you talk to me like that?"

"Good heavens! how am I to talk to you? You should have let me go as I meant to. Why did you propose to drive me to Charlottesville? You knew how it would be—— No, I don't mean that. Forgive me. But you must know that I can't be near you without telling you how I feel to you. You must know that.

Did you expect me to drive all these miles like a stock or a stone? I'm afraid that's not as original as it might be, eh? But look: let me take your glove off?"

In reply she drew her hand decidedly out of his, and buried it in her lap. Her face was turned from him so that he got a mere suggestion of her profile, but he saw that she was blushing desperately.

"I bother you so," he said, with regret.

"No, it isn't that. Oh, what a water-colour study that man would make!"

"Excellent," admitted Dering. The man in question was a young negro of strapping figure, to which his blue jeans shirt and trousers had modelled themselves accurately. On his head was a moth-eaten sealskin cap of a delicious mingled brown. His hands, one of which was bandaged with dirty white cotton, were clasped behind his throat, and he carried his gun through his bended arms.

On his trousers a brace of just-shot hares, dangling to and fro, had left a moist crimson stain. It was the highest note of colour in this study of faded blues and browns, the cotton bandage and the breasts and tails of the poor "molly-cottons" being the only high lights, so to speak.

"Isn't he like one of what's-his-name's aquarelles? Look, now there, as he comes out against that dull-yellowish field—there, with that patchy grey sky above—— Oh, I wish I could paint—with my hands, I mean: I am always painting pictures to myself with my fancy."

"So am I," said Dering. She coloured deeply again, and seemed to have caught the button of her glove in the fur robe.

"Let me help you," he suggested, and, having done so, kept her hand in his. She had not time to withdraw it before they were aware from "Unc' Joshua's" back that something unusual was going on in the road beyond. There is nothing more expressive than a negro coachman's back—not even the eyes of a hungry dog. Apprehension was written in the hunched curve of "Unc' Joshua's" vertebræ and the outward crook of his bowed arms. He half rose, still curiously contorted, and peered from side to side between his horse's ears.

"What's up? Sit down. What's the matter?" said Dering, who was sometimes exasperated by the theatrical gymnastics of would-be-impressive darkies. "Come, what's all this about?" he demanded again.

"Suppn's done broke down in de road, suh," replied Unc' Joshua, still curving and peering—"a waggon or suppn'."

Dering stood up also.

"What is it?" said Barbara, a little nervously.

"I sees! I sees!" now cried Unc' Joshua: "'tis one uh dem young Buzzies. He cyart done broke down—right 'crost de road, too."

"One of the Buzzies!" cried Barbara, in dismay. "Good gracious! we will have to pick him up if his trap's broken. It's too bad! Look again, Uncle Joshua. Are you sure his waggon's broken? Perhaps the harness is just tangled."

"Norm," said the old black, positively, "dey ain' nuttin' twangled dar. 'Tis bust all tuh scrackshuns (*anglicé* unknown).

"I suppose this is young Buzzy coming here now," said Dering, in a surly tone. "What a name!—*Buzzy!*"

"It isn't near as bad as the man," said Barbara, gloomily.

Young Buzzy here appeared at the side of the carry-all and thrust out a lank hand, exposing a frayed red-flannel undershirt-sleeve in the vehemence of his gesture.

"Howdy?" he said, including them both in this concise greeting. "Howdy, Unc' Joshua?" he added.

Unc' Joshua removed his battered silk hat, with an elaborate shifting of lines and whip from one hand to the other.

"Mornin', suh," he said—"mornin', mornin'."

"I cert'n'y am lucky," pursued Mr. Buzzy, again addressing Barbara and Dering. "I wuzn't bawn with a caul for nothin'. Hyah! hyah! Ever read David Copperfield, Mr. —— Excuse *me*, but are you Mr. George Pomfret?"

"No; my name's Dering," replied the addressed, whose manner was perfectly courteous, if somewhat frost-bitten. Barbara was nibbling her inner lip fiercely and trying to look as usual.

"Can't we help you?" pursued Dering. "You seem to have come to grief."

"Come to grief!" echoed the other. "Well, it's more like grief had come to me. Hyah! hyah!" And he laughed again, producing a sound like that made by a stick drawn rapidly along an iron railing. This laugh jarred so on Dering that he felt as though he would like to loosen his skin and jump out of it: as the next best thing, he jumped out of the carry-all and made his way to the wreck of Mr. Buzzy's trap. That gentleman followed shortly, standing resignedly by while Dering inspected the chaos of wine-sap apples, potatoes, and bundles of fodder which were heaped up

about the body of the broken waggon. Its owner ventured no explanation, but remained passive, holding a hairy wrist in either hand, and rubbing his thumbs about on his arms underneath his red-flannel shirt-sleeves. He was otherwise attired in a suit of snuff-brown stripes alternating with black, wore a soft grey felt hat, and a red satin tie with green bars across it.

His face was of a shiny fairness, deepening to a mottled plum-colour on his cheeks and the bridge of his nose, and his eyebrows, which he continually rubbed the wrong way with one of those restless thumbs, were of a pale straw-colour, over eyes which matched the tint upon his cheeks. He had lost a tooth directly in front, and could not keep his tongue from incessantly playing in and out of this unpleasing hollow. Dering felt a great loathing swell his throat, and as Buzzy sidled nearer over the soggy ground, his perfume of damp cloth, hair-oil, and stable did not mitigate this sentiment. Was it possible that he and Barbara would have to drive the rest of the way to Charlottesville behind that reeking personality?

"I suppose the old nigger and you and I couldn't patch it up between us?" he suggested at last, but rather doubtfully.

"Not 'less we could work meracles," replied young Buzzy. "No, that waggon's a goner."

"I'm afraid it is," said Dering.

"It cert'n'y is," affirmed its owner.

XI.

DERING remained silent after Buzzy's last remark. He could not bring himself to make any suggestion concerning a more practical species of aid—namely, the transference of Buzzy and his goods and chattels to their vehicle. They walked back to the carry-all in silence.

"Can you do anything about it?" said Barbara.

"I'm afraid not," replied Dering, sadly.

Barbara was also silent, struggling with the same distaste which had tied Dering's tongue. Young Buzzy kept a steady and resigned gaze upon the waggon, still thumbing his lean arms. Finally Barbara said, with a sort of burst,—

"Can't we give you a lift?"

"I wuz thinkin' 'bout that," replied the unfortunate. "I cert'n'y would be ubbliged."

"What will you do with your horse?" here suggested Dering, with a sudden hope.

Mr. Buzzy was quite prepared for this emergency. "I'll give the little darky somethin' tuh lead him," he replied, adding, with a kind of tilt in Barbara's direction, "With your permission, uv co'se."

"Why, certainly," she answered.

He went off to attend to this little transaction, and Barbara and Dering clutched each other's hands with a simultaneous movement.

"Will we have to take him *all* the way?" said Dering, almost tearfully.

"I'm afraid so," said Barbara, who was entirely tearful.

There was a lump in her throat that made her feel as though she had swallowed a hot hard-boiled egg, shell and all, and it had stuck just below the root of her tongue. Their hands tightened, they cast a desperate glance about: young Buzzy was again approaching them.

"It's damnable!" said Dering, with perhaps pardonable violence—especially as he apologized immediately afterwards.

"No, don't apologize," urged Barbara, hurriedly. I say it's —it's 'damnable' too!"

They burst out laughing just as Buzzy came up.

"We were laughing at my poor little follower's evident fright about leading your horse," explained Barbara, with suave mendacity.

"He is right skeered," Mr. Buzzy admitted, "but he'll git over it. 'Jinks' always balks at firs'—'Jinks' my hawse, yuh know. It's mighty kind in you to give me a lif', Miss Barb—I mean Mis' Pomfret. Excuse *me*, but that 'Missis' business always sticks in my throat when I look at you. You don't look a day older'n you did when we boys an' girls used tuh dress the church for Chris'mus——"

"I don't want to hurry you, Mr. Buzzy," here interpolated Dering, "but Mrs. Pomfret is kindly driving me to Charlottesville to catch the 6.30 train, and I wouldn't like to miss it."

"Cert'n'y—cert'n'y," said Mr. Buzzy, who still hesitated, however. He sidled towards Unc' Joshua and took him into his confidence in an undertone. "Say, Unc' Joshua"—it was thus that he expressed himself—"'s there any room fur them pertaters 'n' wine-saps onder the seat or anywhere? It'll mean a drink in Charlottesville, yuh know."

While he and Unc' Joshua arranged this matter, Barbara and Dering again devoured one another's rebellious faces with hungry eyes. All at once Dering stooped and pretended to be arranging something on the floor of the carry-all. In truth he was pressing his lips rapidly, first against Barbara's gown, and then against the curve of her instep."

"Oh, don't! don't!" she urged, in a vehement whisper. "My horrid boot! Oh, *don't!*—PLEASE!"

He lifted his head, a little flushed, and looked at her with a certain brilliancy, as of one who has been drinking wine. At the same moment Mr. Buzzy came around to the other side of the carriage.

"If you'll excuse *me*," he remarked, "I'll git one ur two pa'cels 'fore we start."

"Certainly," replied Barbara again, and again Mr. Buzzy went off in the direction of his waggon. He, his wine-saps and potatoes, being safely stowed away, they started towards Charlottesville, stopped every now and then by young Walsingham's appeals for help regarding the recreant Jinks, who, as his master had said, balked sometimes. Buzzy himself was inclined to be talkative, and told various anecdotes, including Unc' Joshua in the conversation, with great geniality.

"Name of a dog," exclaimed Dering, in French, "this is atrocious!"

"Name of a blue pig, it is!" replied Barbara, gravely. They laughed again.

"Yo're laughin' reminds me," said Mr. Buzzy, "of a story my ole Unc' Nelson Cunnin'ham use'ter tell." And forthwith they were regaled with one of the extremely long anecdotes of Mr. Nelson Cunningham.

"Please put your hand on my knee again—just once," urged Dering, under cover of the boisterous hilarity which his own anecdotal powers had called forth in Mr. Buzzy. "I won't touch it if you tell me not to." He waited anxiously, and was presently rewarded by a soft clasp upon his knee, which sent such a delightful thrill through him that he actually smiled in response to Mr. Buzzy's toothy grin.

"That's what I call a first-rater," announced the latter, appealing afterwards to Unc' Joshua. "What *you* think, Unc' Joshua?"

"Fus'-rate, suh—fus'-rate!"

"Hyah! hyah! Unc' Joshua, *you* know a good story when you hear one—eh?"

"Yes, *suh!* Hyah! hyah!"

"Br-r-r! I wish we could walk the rest of the way!" said Dering, in overwhelming disgust.

"It is dreadful," admitted Barbara. "But here's the Long Bridge. We are nearly there."

"What a lovely country it is!" breathed Dering, leaning far out to have a glimpse of the pretty hills that hug Charlottesville, before they were entunnelled by the Long Bridge. "I am never so glad that I am a Southerner as when I drive near Charlottesville on a day like this."

"Or when you think that a few like Mr. B. are your compatriots," suggested Barbara, who was so bitterly unhappy that she felt like indulging in wild laughter. As the rumble of the Long Bridge drowned their voices, they could talk more unrestrainedly.

"You were so good to come," said Dering, to whom the novelty of the idea made this remark seem ever novel.

"I *wanted* to come," answered Barbara, who found no monotony in this reply.

"And you will telegraph if you need me—or—or—anything?"

"Yes."

"Promise."

"Well."

"Say you promise."

"I promise."

He got his arm around her; for an instant she breathed difficultly against his side; then they rolled out again into the faded daylight.

"My Unc' Nelson Cunningham use'ter say he had eyes in the skin of his back, like a pertater, when he sat befo' two young folks going thoo' a tunnel," remarked Mr. Buzzy, jovially, as the horses struck out again into a round trot. "Hyah! hyah!"

"Hyah! hyah!" chuckled Unc' Joshua.

"Beast! I'd like to choke him!" ejaculated Dering between his teeth.

"I wish you would," said Barbara, who was of a lively flame-colour.

"You don't seem to perriciate my remarks?" here put in Mr. Buzzy, to whom this twisting of words constituted a form of humour.

"I don't think we were listening at the time of your last obsertion," said Dering, grimly.

"I said my Unc' Nel——"

"Good gracious! is the Rivanna always so swollen at this time of the year?" asked Barbara, looking out.

"Pen's on th' rains. I said my Unc'——"

"The rains? But then it always rains a good deal in November, doesn't it?"

"Well, right smart, gen'lly. Unc' Nelson said——"

"Oh, yes, I remember now, of course. I wonder if any one could swim the Rivanna?"

"I done it, lars' summer," announced Buzzy, with an impressive seriousness. He twisted about, hanging both arms over the back of the seat, and looking down at that lazy river as though he expected from it some sign of recognition.

"You must be a very good swimmer."

"Tolabul. Torm Cunnin'ham—my Unc' Nelson Cunnin'ham's boy—kin outswim me, though. That boy kin *swim!*—*You* know him, Unc' Joshua?"

"Sut'n'y, suh—sut'n'y, sut'ny. Marse Torm kin *swim!*"

"You mus' remember him, Miss Ba—excuse *me*, Mrs. Pomfret—don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Barbara, vaguely. It was a species of utter apathetic misery that had seized her. They had now entered Charlottesville, and the drenched, forsaken village streets were beginning to depress her unutterably.

"Drive us a little way up Park Street, Uncle Joshua," she said and leaned back, looking silently about, as they rolled along this charming avenue, which is not unlike Lovers' Lane in Newport.

It would be hard to decide which was most miserable, Barbara or Dering. Buzzy's presence thrust into their *tête-à-tête* was something as when a New Orleans masker during Mardi-Gras shoves his grotesque self between two lovers about to embrace. Their words choked them, and they not only saw the actual Buzzy, but had exasperating visions of brother and sister Buzzies, with his home in the background—a home whose whitewashed walls bore many excrescences in the shape of old photographs framed in round walnut frames, whose square piano was covered with a red-and-black-stamped woollen cover, whose sofa was of green reps disgorging black horse-hair, and whose hall was carpeted with oil-cloth, and strewn with round rush mats. Besides, it was impossible to get rid of him: he had at once announced his intention of "sticking by them," to see Dering off, and to provide for Barbara when he should be gone: so they drove to the station still with Buzzy on the box-seat. Barbara, who had a nervous and uncontrollable terror of locomotives, grasped Dering's hand unceremoniously as they neared the net-work of tracks.

"Hyah! hyah!" whispered Buzzy, whose shoulders they saw move hilariously.

"Hyah! hyah!" echoed Unc' Joshua, huskily.

They got out of the carry-all in a dumb but violent passion, and walked together to the waiting-room.

This waiting-room was big and airy, and when they entered there was no one else in possession. Mr. Buzzy officiously darted off to see after Dering's luggage, and they were at last free to indulge in conversation without an audience. Unfortunately, all the tumultuous ideas which had clamoured for vent in the carry-all seemed now to have followed hot on the heels of the vanished Buzzy.

"I wonder if that clock's right?" ventured Dering.

"Oh, of course," said Barbara. "They wouldn't dare have it wrong."

"No, I suppose not," he admitted. "Then I've got three-quarters of an hour."

"A little more than that. Suppose we sit down?"

"Good Lord! what an oaf I am! You must be tired to death."

They sat down, after Dering had made an elaborate arrangement of his satchel and overcoat.

"Thirty-nine minutes now," said Barbara. "Does a waiting-room depress you as it does me?"

"I don't think anything could be worse."

"I almost wish I hadn't come."

"Don't say that!" He slipped his hand through the hollow arm of the seat, and took surreptitious possession of her now ungloved fingers.

"Mind," she whispered, "the ticket-agent is just opposite."

"Disgusting!" murmured Dering. They were silent for a second or two, at the end of which time he took a small object from his pocket, and laid it in her lap.

"I want you to keep that," he said. "It's—it's the prayer-book I was telling you of—the one, you know, I found *that* in—about the 'living,' you know. Don't shrink, darling."

She turned to him with a sudden, wild movement that caused the little volume to slip on the floor at her feet. "Oh, I am so unhappy! I am so unhappy!" she said, giving him her clinched hands, and withdrawing them as suddenly. Both stooped together to lift the fallen prayer-book.

"Perhaps this will help you. You won't let me help you," he said, despairingly. She sank back between the iron arms of her chair, holding the book against her breast, and moving her lips slightly as though in prayer. Dering bent down his head near her.

"Say something for me," he whispered, shakenly.

"I am; I am. It's what I'm doing."

"God keep you, my pure one, my true one!"

"Well, ef you two knew the trouble I'd had checkin' yo' thousand-and-one trunks, sir, you'd take up a subscription for me right here in this station-house!" ejaculated at this juncture the voice of Mr. Buzzy.

Dering looked up at him from under his lowered brows with a quietly murderous expression; Barbara, bending over, pretended to be tying her shoe.

"How many of them cur'ous boxes have you got, anyhow?" pursued the young gentleman, entirely unconscious. He wiped his whole face and the spaces behind his fat ears with a large purple-and-white silk handkerchief, regarding the fabric afterwards intently, and then crumpling it into his hat, which he

replaced on his head. "Why don' chu charter a cyar 'n' chuck yore things in that? 'T'ould be a heap less trouble. Well, here yo' checks."

"Thanks," said Dering, pocketing them. "I'm sorry you had so much trouble."

"Oh, 'twa'n't any reel trouble," replied Buzzy, genially. "I was jes' gassin'. Look hyuh: wouldn't you like somethin' tuh eat?—both o' you? They've got a reel nice resterrant hyuh."

"Nothing—nothing at all, thank you," replied both, hastily.

"Not a cupper coffee? Some tea, then? They have firs'-rate i'scream—sommer that? Not a *thing?* Well, Miss—a—Misses Pomfret' ll die 'fore she gits home: *you* may git on a buffet cyar. *Lem*me git you a cupper tea?"

This monologue was interspersed with a series of "No, thank yous," "No, thanks," from Barbara and Dering. Their tormentor finally desisted.

"Well," he ejaculated at last, "think I'll set down."

Barbara and Dering looked at each other with eyes that groaned. They had now a scant twenty minutes.

"Yo' train's due in twenty minutes," said Mr. Buzzy, blithely. "Got all yo' things together?"

"Yes," snapped Dering.

"That's right. I reckon you're right use'ter travellin'. Ben all over Europe, haven't yuh?"

"No."

"Excuse *me,* but yuh cert'n'y look hit."

"Did you say my train was due in twenty minutes?"

"Seventeen, now."

"Would you mind asking if it's on time?"

"I know," said Mr. Buzzy. "'Tis."

Barbara felt as though she could not stand it another moment. Her ears sang, and she hated Buzzy in a way that astonished herself. She thought that she would almost rejoice to see the Express that was to bear Dering from her roll over the odoriferous body of the other. She stood up to her full height, with a quick, gasping breath, and then sat down again.

"Are you ill?" said Dering, in alarm.

"What's the matter?" said Buzzy, also scrambling to his feet.

"Nothing. I was crushing my dress."

"Ha! *that!*" laughed Buzzy. "You shot up in such a hurry I reckoned yore bustle must have springs in it!"

"Mr. Buzzy," said Dering, in elaborately slow and distinct

tones, "I have something of importance to say to Mrs. Pomfret and I have now only thirteen minutes in which to say it. Could you be so very kind as to leave us together?"

If he had thought to freeze Buzzy by this frigid and biting address, he was vastly mistaken.

"Cert'n'y—cert'n'y," acquiesced that personage at once. "Why didn't you tip me the wink? I'd er twigged. Reckon I'll go'n git a snack." And he went.

XII.

"NOW!" said Dering, looking at her. His look was so intense, so beseeching, that she imagined herself in his arms.

"My heart aches so!—it aches so!" she said, piteously. Her lip began to quiver, and she turned from him, having that wisdom which teaches a woman to let a man observe the signs of her grief everywhere save in her face. She did not want Dering to carry away a picture of her features pursed up in the ridiculous distortions of real sorrow.

"It aches so!" she said again. "I wish I could cut it out!" She ground her teeth a little savagely. "I suffer too much!" she panted.

Dering came close to her. His heart's core yearned over her, but he had a consciousness in the very curls on the back of his head that the ticket-agent was regarding them interestedly through his little window.

"My love—my heart's heart—what can I do?" he whispered. "What can I say? You will let me write?"

"Yes, yes," she said, in a choking voice. It hurt her to think that he had considered not writing as a possibility. The big railway-clock ticked on pompously.

"Can't you stop that odious thing?" she asked, and then began to laugh hysterically.

"Hush!" said Dering, taking her upper arms into a firm grasp, and looking at her with bright, masterful eyes. "This has been too much for you," he said, regretfully, as they sat down again.

"It wouldn't have been if that gr-r-r— that bad-smelling scoundrel hadn't——"

Here Barbara began to laugh again: he tried to silence her as before, and ended by joining in.

"Oh, how *ghastly* it all is!" she exclaimed, finally, as, their paroxysm over, she began to wipe her eyes with little sideward sweeps of the different hems of her pocket-handkerchief. Then, with a violent start, "Oh! is he coming again? I thought I heard him."

"If he does, there'll be one Buzzy less in his apparently prolific family," replied Dering, grimly.

"Well, never mind him. Say something to me that I can remember—something gentle. Oh, *God!* I am so wretched!"

"Listen, then. I love you—I *love* you—I LOVE you."

"Hush! be careful! Thank you. Oh, you are so good!—Oh! *look* at that horrible baby!"

"Gir-r-r! Why did you call my attention to it?"

"But it is so hideous. It fascinates me. Look! *look!* Why, it's head wobbles about just like 'She's'!"

"Isn't that rather ungrammatical?" he asked, making the national joke then in vogue.

"And its hands!—they are all creased, as if they had been washed and rough-dried and never ironed out. Isn't that little, blue-worsted cap it has on awful? I suppose that woman is its mother. *Look* at her poking it under the chin! How can she! Oh! it's blowing bubbles out of its mouth. Oh, how awful! Can't we get away from it?—anywhere!—anywhere! Let's go out on the platform."

She dragged him out just in time to see his train come in. As it clanked by, she lifted her great, wretched eyes, heavy with shadows, full to his.

"I feel as if I had ten hearts," she said, "each too big for me, and as if every time those heavy wheels turned over they crushed one."

"Darling!" was all that he could answer, in a tone of entreaty.

"Will you write from Washington?"

"This very night. I'll write on the train and post it when we get to Washington. Barbara?"

"Yes. What is it? What is it?"

"Do you—love me—just a little?"

"You know I do. It is different, but I do. Dearly—dearly."

"What do you mean by 'different'?"

"I don't know. I'll write it to you. Don't let those men run so near you with those great trucks: it makes me nervous."

"Then you will write to me?"

"Yes. They will be very stupid letters, though. There isn't anything to write about here."

"You silly dear!" Barbara winced. "As if I wanted to hear about anything but yourself! You'll put *that* in sometimes, won't you? And you'll——"

"I reckon you'd better be gettin' yo' things together," broke in Mr. Buzzy, who here came towards them, nibbling the end of a chicken-wing. "Excuse *me*, but this fried chick'n's too good tuh let slide. I'll take yo' satchel, suh."

"Thanks," said Dering. He turned and grasped Barbara's hands once more, as Buzzy disappeared into the sleeper. They both tried to speak, swallowed, and murmured some indistinct words, which were drowned in the noise of a passing truck. The locomotive gave a series of hoarse, barking whistles, and the bell began to clang slowly, while the jarring "jink-jank" of a train about to move off passed through the whole fabric. Dering loosed her hands, clutched them once more, gave her a heart-broken look, and plunged into the Pullman, just as Mr. Buzzy swung staggering off on the platform. Barbara had withdrawn at once into the waiting-room, and was busy gathering up her muff and umbrella, when Buzzy rejoined her.

"I say, now," he began, in a cajoling tone, "come 'n' have a little snack. The coffee's jes' ez hot 'n' good. Will you?"

"Thank you, I'm not at all hungry," stammered poor Barbara. The spell of the horrible waiting-room was upon her, and she could not imagine how happiness ever came to human beings who lived in a world inhabited also by locomotives, negro porters, and young men of Buzzy's ilk. She stared at him absently with her wide, beautiful eyes, twisting the folds of her umbrella tighter and tighter in her strong, ungloved hands.

"I'm not at all hungry," she said, again.

"Some wine, then," he urged. "You look mighty pale. Virginia claret's firs'-rate—mh?"

"I'm not thirsty; thank you very much."

"Well, but jes' fuh med'cine—mh?"

"I don't want anything. I don't want any wine, thank you, Mr. Buzzy."

Buzzy rubbed one of his lemon-coloured eyebrows with a contemplative and dubious thumb.

"Uv co'se, ef you're bent on it," he said.

"Thank you," replied Barbara, vaguely.

When she got into the cab which he had ordered for her, he stepped in also.

"Jes' drive with you to th' liv'ry-stable 'n' see you in yore own cay'idge," he explained. "Unc' Joshua took his horses there tuh feed 'm, uv co'se."

"Of course," said Barbara.

"Cert'n'y has got dark sudden," he exclaimed, in another tone, peering up at the dim sky, first through one window, then through the other.

"Very," said Barbara.

"Choll'tt'sville ain't lighted 's well 's might be—is it?"

"Not at all," said Barbara. A droll sort of parody on a celebrated saying began to drum regularly in her ears. She repeated it over and over: "Some are born with neighbours, some achieve neighbours, and some have neighbours thrust upon them." She was beginning to think that Buzzy meant to drive all the way back to Rosemary with her. His monotonous voice interrupted her reverie:

"Wonder why yo' frien' was so set on takin' that p'tic'lar train?"

"He wanted to be in New York to-morrow."

"Well, he could 'a' taken th' 7.30 jes' 's well."

"What 7.30?" said Barbara, excitedly.

"Why, the 7.30 Express."

She looked at him, feeling a quiver run through her—a thrill of indignation and disappointment. "Do you mean to say that there is another train that goes at 7.30?" she said, in a very low voice.

"Why, cert'n'y," replied Mr. Buzzy. He took off his hat, regarded the purple-and-white material with which it was brimming over, and then, as if undecided, placed hat and contents between his knees.

"Did you mention that to Mr. Dering?" questioned the low voice.

"Never thought tuh. Thought he knew, uv co'se. *Hyuh* we are!" And he bounded out through the carriage door, which only opened after vigorous batterings of his knee. He appeared almost simultaneously at the other door, through which he thrust his affable visage.

"'S all right," he announced. "Unc' Joshua's all ready—jes gotter light th' candles. Mr. Payne'll attend tuh them."

She leaned back in apathetic silence, after another dreary "Thank you," and watched Mr. Payne's stalwart figure in its shiny oil-cloth cloak, which reflected back the white-grey sky in a faint glisten. A swift, pattering rain was falling, although through the fleecy clouds the light of a full but unseen moon filtered wanly. "I don't b'leeve you'll need no candles," said Mr. Buzzy, turning around and around, and regarding the dripping sky with face and hands uplifted. Mr. Payne put those articles in, however, and Unc' Joshua drove off, after Barbara had thanked both men for their services.

"Oh, it don't make a dit o' bifference!" exclaimed the jovial Buzzy in return, having recourse to one of his contorted combinations of words.

Barbara, rolling along with closed eyes over the rough and night-veiled roads that led from Charlottesville to Rosemary, tried to imagine what Dering was then doing. She fancied him asking the porter some trivial question, raising his voice a little in order to be heard above the incessant clinking of surrounding objects Then he took out a memorandum-book and a pencil. He began his letter to her. She tried to fancy the first words as they would look when written, but she saw so many terms of endearment that she was undecided. Her imagination was disturbed by visions of the omnipresent and always thirsty child who traverses the aisles of Pullman sleeping-cars in the direction of the water-cooler, followed by an anxious nursemaid attached to the end of its petticoat. This child had, in her imagination, flaxen hair which was begrimed with cinders, and a corresponding complexion. It drank water incessantly, spilling it copiously over its fat, chapped chin, and when it was not drinking water it was gnawing a large drumstick of chicken or munching huge pieces of gingerbread.

There was the semi-invalid, who had gone to sleep with her head on a soot-streaked pillow. There was the drummer, who had also gone to sleep in a quilted travelling-cap, with a fat hand, ornamented by a large bloodstone ring, displayed upon his gay trousers. There was the young demoiselle with abundant curls and giggles, who was travelling alone under charge of the conductor, and to whom the conductor was now addressing a series of facetious remarks. There was the section full of young men and

women who talked in such loud, boisterous tones that their conversation could be heard above everything else. There was the fat woman who was forever putting things in her satchel and taking them out; the two middle-aged discussers of politics; the—— She opened her eyes and leaned forward, far into the raw, mist-laden air. The hills were a blurred outline, the fields masses of rich gloom. She had one thing, at all events, to be thankful for: she was not in a Pullman sleeping-car.

Unc' Joshua had to lift her bodily out of the carriage in his strong arms when they reached Rosemary. He and Rameses almost carried her upstairs to her bedroom, where a blithe fire was blazing and a pretty tea-table drawn up before its glow Martha Ellen, on turning to greet her mistress with a pleased smile, was horrified to see her cast herself on her knees before the big chintz-covered chair and break into wild sobbing.

"Lor! Miss Barb'ra! Lor! Miss Barb'ra, chile! *Lor!* honey!" she ejaculated, at intervals. "Miss Barb'ra—my *own* Miss Barb'ra —*don'* cry so! *Don'*, honey! Lemme go fur Sarah. I'm goin' fur Sarah."

She flew on nimble feet, and returned with this Sarah, who was a little, delicate, thin woman of about forty, possessing a face as keen and sweet as it was plain. She wore her black wool in neat masses pinned close to her head, and her small figure in its close black gown resembled an exclamation-point, so slight and decided was it.

Though so diminutive, she was apparently very strong, for she stooped and lifted Barbara from where she was kneeling, and took her on her breast. She said nothing, merely motioning Rameses to leave them, by a certain movement of her head. Then she began to rock herself to and fro, with a gentle, crooning sound, such as women make over ailing babies, stroking the lovely, copper-coloured head on her breast from time to time with her tender, dark fingers, sometimes pressing a dusky cheek against its bright lustre, sometimes reaching up furtively to dash the tears from her own eyes.

After a while she coaxed her mistress to lie on the sofa, while she prepared a warm bath for her, moving about the room with noiseless swiftness, her very skirts having a subdued sound, which was to the noise made by the skirts of other women as a whisper is to laughter. The room was soon fragrant with the attar of roses which she had shaken into the tepid water until it was milky,

and she then arranged some fine linen garments on the bed, and leaned over her mistress, saying, in a delicious guttural,—

"Miss Barb'ra, darlin', yo' barth's ready. I'll go out in th' hall till you call me."

In reply, Barbara reached up her arms and drew down the small, woolly head, against her shoulder.

"Oh," she sighed, "I am so miserable! I am so miserable! I am so miserable!"

"Yes, yes, darlin' Miss Barb'ra, but joy comes in th' mornin'."

"Oh, but when will it be morning? Comfort me, Sarah! Sarah, can't you comfort me? I comforted you that time when you were so unhappy. Didn't I? Didn't I?"

"Th' dear Lord He knows you did, Miss Barb'ra. I'll never forget you—no, not whiles I lives—no, not when I'm dead. I'd come to you out er my grave ef you called for me."

"Don't talk of graves!—talk of life—life—life! Oh, Sarah, isn't death a dreadful thought? Isn't it awful? Don't you *wish* we could just disappear—just be snatched away somewhere, and nothing be left of us? Oh, I am so unhappy! Comfort me! Comfort me! Can't you think of anything that will comfort me?"

"Think of how good you are, darlin'. That ought tuh comfut you. Think how ev'ybody loves you—*ev'y*body, Miss Barb'ra, down to my po' little girl, that you has done so much for. She thinks they ain' *no*body like Miss Barb'ra. She says a little prayer for you, ev'y night. Think of all the good you has done. Think of how good an' sweet an' kin' you are, *all* the time, to *ev'y*body. Oh, Miss Barb'ra, *darlin'* Miss Barb'ra, *you* oughtn' tuh be unhappy! Now take yo' nice, warm barth, an' then you'll feel so much better. I put so much scent in it, th' whole room smells jes' like summer-time. Come on: yo' pretty little nightgown's all ready, an' th' white furs all spread out fur you tuh stan' on. *Come* on, Miss Barb'ra. Let Sarah help you up. Think of how *ev'y*body loves you—th' farm-han's an' *ev'y*body."

"Do they really love me, Sarah?" asked the girl, in the childish tone and manner that always accompanies absolute misery. "It *is* good to be loved: isn't it, Sarah? It helped you that time for me to love you: didn't it? I'm glad they love me." Then, as Sarah was about to leave the room, "put your arms around me once more. Hold me tight—tight—tighter still: I don't care if it hurts. *You* love me—don't you, Sarah?"

"Th' dear Saviour in heaven *He* knows I does, Miss Barb'ra."

"And you think I'll be happy some day?"

"Miss Barb'ra, I knows you will—I *knows* you will."

"And will you pray about it?"

"I duz pray about it, darlin' Miss Barb'ra. They ain't *no* time, night or day, when I prays, that I don't pray 'bout you. Now *take* yo' barth, 'fore it gets cold."

She went out, closing the door, which Barbara opened almost immediately afterwards.

"Sarah——"

"Yes'm?"

"Sarah, come here just one minute. Just hold me again one minute, and say you think I'll be happy."

The little woman clasped the beautiful figure with fervent, sinewy brown arms.

"I knows you will!" she reiterated. I *knows* you will!"

"And you love me?"

"Miss Barb'ra, the good Lord Himself will have to make you understan' that. I can't seem to do it. *Darlin'* Miss Barb'ra!"

When, having taken her fragrant bath, Barbara lay like some sweet-smelling flower between the fine sheets of her girlhood's bed, Sarah, kneeling beside her in the firelight, stroked gently and unceasingly the languid, half-bare arm nearest her.

"That's so good! that's so good!" murmured the girl, in a tired voice. Suddenly she roused herself.

"Oh, I forgot! Look on the table, Sarah, and hand me that little book—the one with the cross on it. There; no—a little farther to the end. There, that's it." She took it eagerly, and, while slipping it under her pillow, kissed it furtively.

"Rub my arm some more, Sarah." In another moment she started up again. "Sarah, bring the candle. I'm going to choose a verse. You open it. What's your finger on? Read it."

Sarah read slowly, in her uncertain, soft tone, and with her earnest face close to the fine print. It is quite true that the little coloured woman read the following words to that beautiful, distracted, quivering, yearning creature in the bed beside her—read these words:

"For in death no man remembereth thee, and who——"

"That will do—that will do, Sarah. Put out the candle."

As the warm dusk of the firelight again encompassed them, she reached out and drew Sarah to her with both arms.

"You don't know why, dear, but that was a message to me. Perhaps—I—may—be—happy—again."

"Miss Barb'ra, I *knows* you will!"

"Well, good night, little Sarah. Don't forget to say that prayer. Will you rub my other arm a little longer?"

XIII.

IT is true that Dering had made an attempt to write while on the train, as he had promised, but it is also true that he was obliged to abandon the idea, since his chirography, at no time good, was rendered entirely undecipherable by the motion of the car. He replaced note-book and pencil, and gave himself up to contemplation of the flying landscape. It was dreary, colourless, monotonous. The ragged negroes and vehicles at the tumble-down stations depressed him. One horrible, legless old woman, huddled in what appeared to be a very large, wooden bread-trough, was made radiant by all the loose silver in his pockets; and she called on heaven to bless him until the train was out of hearing-distance. As it grew darker, the squares of light from the car-windows, flitting up and down on the uneven ground, made him dizzy. He drew down the curtain, and leaned back against the window-frame, closing his eyes. The horrible, jarring din about him actually interfered with his thoughts, so that he could scarcely recall Barbara's face as he had last seen it, sallow and pinched with grief; but he remembered finally, with a species of incredulity, that it had been lovely in spite of its yellowish tone and the great shadows under her eyes. How she had looked at him that last second! His heart gave a hot leap along his breast to his throat, leaving a fiery track behind it as of sparks. He tried to fancy her beside him: they were married; her wrap and umbrella were on the opposite seat; she had put her feet up beside his: he could fancy the very lights that would sparkle on her smart varnished boots. She would pretend to read: he fancied she would not talk much to him: in fact, people would think they were rather bored with each other. Then he would call her atten-

tion to some passing object, and, as she leaned across him to look, he would kiss the great knot of her sea-smelling hair. That would thrill her with an exquisitely delicate sense of loving and being loved: she would give the subtle, cowering shiver that he remembered, and press slightly against him as she leaned back with an expression more coldly bored and indifferent than ever. It suddenly swept over him that with each abominable rattle of that noisy train he was being whirled farther and farther away from all those delicate charms. What if she were to be ill?—to need him? What if she were ill at this very moment? What if the mettlesome steeds of Unc' Joshua were dashing in a mad run over those wretchedly rough roads? He could fancy her lying senseless in that thick gloom, with just a thin stream of blood from her temple shining out vividly. A cold sweat broke out on his own forehead.

"How far are we from Washington?" he asked the porter, who passed by at that moment.

"Be 'n Eleksandria 'n 'bout fift' minutes," replied the man, making quick flourishes over the back and arms of the opposite seat with a large feather duster.

"Thanks," said Dering.

"Kin I get yah anything, suh?" asked the porter, in tones which meant, "Won't you give me something?" but which Dering was too worried or restless to notice.

"No, thanks," he said, shortly, and then, as the man lingered, thrust his head under the still lowered curtain and kept it there until the porter had disappeared.

When they reached Washington, he took a hansom and drove directly to Wormley's, where the first thing he asked for, after securing a room, was pen and paper. He got so nervous, however, after he had written ten lines that he pushed everything aside, and, summoning a waiter, ordered another hansom to be called in an hour. This interval he devoted chiefly to a cold bath, which braced him up a good deal, and to an excellent dinner. He then plunged into the cab, after the impetuous fashion which distinguished him, ordering the bewildered cabby to drive "Anywhere."

"Anywhere, sir? How, sir? How long, sir?"

"Till I tell you to stop."

"All right, sir. Cert'n'y, sir. Ten o'clock, sir. Dollar an hour, sir."

"Yes, I know it is," grumpily. "And if you try to beat me for more, you'll regret it."

"Yessir. All right, sir."

Off they started—clatter-clack, clatter-clack, b-r-r-r-r-r, clatter-clack, clatter-clack, clatter-clack, b-r-r-r-r-r-r — that inimitable sound of wheels and horses' feet on the asphalt which Dering usually found so delightful. To-night it put him in a species of fever, and he sat with his shoulders drawn up in a rebelliously surly attitude. It seemed incomprehensible and unnatural that scarce one hundred miles away the same soft rain was falling on those muddy Albemarle roads, blurring the graceful outline of the hills, and frosting Barbara's window-panes. Here, in the biting glare of electric lights, the heavy foliage of the trees took on a theatrical seeming; they appeared like shapes cut out of dingy green cardboard. The figures of hurrying pedestrians reflected downward in the rain-washed pavements, and the similarly reproduced cabs with their steaming horses, reminded him of clever Indian-ink sketches by French artists. Was it possible that only a few hours ago Unc' Joshua had been driving him along a primitive Virginian turnpike, with Mr. Buzzy ensconced upon the front seat? His whole life of the past few months looked unreal to him in this winking, blue-white glare. He could not analyze any of the feelings that tormented him, being only conscious of a fierce lack, which once or twice deceived him into thinking that he was physically hungry. In the midst of these soaked and thronging streets, he was beset by an intolerable sense of unimportance; he had no acquaintances in Washington, and knew very little of the town itself, else he would have sought out some person, congenial or otherwise, with whom to pass those dreary hours of enforced waiting.

He roused suddenly and glanced about him. They were passing the White House, which looked in the electric waver like a large Christmas-card ornamented with mica and with windows of isinglass, behind which lighted candles were being held. Broken gusts of chatter and music alternated with the patter of the horses' feet and the rumble of wheels; the trees more than ever resembled those of the foot-light Arcadia, and through the pale sky overhead a glittering dust seemed sifting, as though through a great sieve. He was depressed without knowing why; the very brightness and diversity of the passing scene filled him with a sense of gloom; and it was not until he had stopped the cab a moment, to bestow five dollars on a hunchbacked lad, that his spirits rose at all. These acts of unguided and munificent charity were one of Dering's panaceas against the blues; he found it cheering to re-

member the amazed expressions of gratitude, both facial and vocal, that were turned upon him.

When he reached his hotel again, he once more attacked the promised letter to Barbara. This was very up-hill work, as he did not know what manner of missive she expected from him, and was, moreover, wholly unused to writing love-letters. To begin it was impossible. "My dear Barbara" looked too cold and unnatural. "My darling" was, under the circumstances, out of the question. He compromised by starting off abruptly: "Have just arrived in Washington, and find I cannot leave until 9.15 to-morrow morning." Here he stopped and began to walk up and down the room, which was a large one and adapted to this caged-beast order of exercise. It struck him that thus far his letter was too telegraphic both in style and matter, and at the same time a brilliant idea occurred to him. Why not telegraph, merely, from Washington, and write from New York? He put this plan into execution at once, and on the next morning Barbara received the following message, which had originally been written in French, but which, owing to the intricacies of Dering's handwriting and to certain deficiencies in the education of the telegraph operator, reached her in the state below recorded:—

"Se malhoornse ma faib tellemnt de mal que jetait malade pouvait pat ecrire. Pe regrettig pat lee passe, ilyu trap di futilite. Rodedens. Toujooe at voue."

(No signature.)

She had been in such a nervous state all day, expecting momentarily the advent of that promised and lengthy bulletin, that the effect of this unparalleled billet-doux was to throw her into fits of genuine if somewhat frantic laughter. She screamed with merriment until large tears rolled down her face and blotted the slip of yellow paper in her hand; then, the first sense of humour having passed, she became conscious of a keen disappointment. She could not possibly hope for a letter until three days had passed, and in the meantime her only solace would be that mangled message on her lap. She gave the hopeless and helpless sigh of a woman who feels that she could make better love than her lover, and threw herself back among the white furs on her sofa, trying to imagine the words that he would say to her, rather than those which he would write.

XIV.

DERING, in the meantime, had reached New York, and, after an elaborate and regenerating toilet, was sauntering into the Manhattan Club to lunch *tête-à-tête* with his thoughts of Barbara. The letter was as yet unwritten, but he felt material for it accumulating in his mind.

As he entered the dining-room he jostled against a man who was also going in, and, turning to apologize, recognized an acquaintance who made up in charm what he lacked in youth. He was a Bostonian of the Bostonians, but this fact did not at all clash with his present whereabouts, as Bostonians seem a species of social whale that have to come up in New York to breathe. What did somewhat astound Dering, however, was the fact that Mr. Everstone Beanpoddy proposed that they should lunch together—distinguished personages of a certain age generally preferring to partake of youthful society and Little-Neck clams at different times; and it was with an almost overwhelmed sensation that Dering seated himself in the chair opposite to Mr. Beanpoddy, at one of the small tables. This, by the way, was the gentleman who had recommended him to select for a feminine friend a woman who had known some great sorrow, his reason for this advice being that, having known grief personally, she would be less ready than most of her sisters to inflict it on another.

"You're looking rather fagged," he now remarked, stretching his fingers among the wine-glasses, as though he were about to strike a chord on some instrument and awaited the harmonious result with pleasure. "Not recovered from race-week yet?"

"I wasn't in town on race-week," said Dering, wondering if he had better answer "Washington" or "Tuxedo" to the question that he knew would follow, and vaguely curious as to the unusual mid-day genialness of Mr. Beanpoddy.

"Not in town, eh? I must have a better look at you. You are a remarkable young man. Was it from necessity or a sense of duty that you absented yourself? And if you weren't in town, where were you?"

Dering had formed his lips to pronounce the name of the Father of his Country, when Mr. Beanpoddy interrupted him.

"Ah, I remember now," said he: "you've been in Virginia.

Some one told me—some woman. You've a cousin there, haven't you?—a cousin by marriage—young Pomfret's widow. Some one told me she was a great beauty—another woman, too. It must be true." He glanced up here, and saw that Dering was colouring furiously.

"Ah! so that's true, too," he continued, calmly. "Another woman told me that. Your absence during race-week is quite accounted for. Am I to condole with or congratulate you?"

"Neither," said Dering, shortly, and then forced a laugh, feeling that he had shown temper.

"Then I will congratulate you on not having to condole with you. Your seedy appearance, however, is not yet accounted for." He waited a moment or two, as if expecting a reply, and then went on: "In spite of your expressive and laconic reply, my dear boy, I'm afraid that you're hard hit—down on your luck, so to speak. I remember we had an interesting conversation on the subject of friendship between the sexes, just before you left for Virginia. I am sure that you will pardon my suspicions when you reflect on the exact correspondence of Mrs. Valentine Pomfret's personality with a bit of advice that I gave you. Let me add one thing. If any one were to ask me what I considered grief, of any kind, most nearly to resemble, I would reply by slightly misquoting the words of the Prince of Denmark—'a mouse-trap.' If you ask why, or if you will allow me to tell you why," pursued Mr. Beanpoddy, in whom the matutinal vermouth cocktail had begun to stir the spirit of epigram, "I will say that grief is always a trap. We walk into it sometimes quite blindfold; sometimes the smell of the toasted cheese which it contains is too much for us; sometimes we get nipped by trying to help some brother mouse out. But it is always wiser, in the event of being caught, to content ourselves in the fixed compartment with such of the cheese as remains, rather than to go whirling around in the revolving portion, rubbing our nose against the wire, exhausting ourselves, and always ending where the first evolution began. At least, such is my experience."

And Mr. Beanpoddy, having delivered himself of this monologue, leaned back in his chair, over the back of which he strapped his napkin, holding an end in either hand and looking genially at Dering. The latter was making elaborate designs in his salt-cellar, and seemed absent-minded. He generally gave Mr. Beanpoddy, whom he considered a brilliant person, the whole of his attention; but on this occasion he had lost half of the other's

harangue while adding to the material for The Letter, and he had just composed a rather telling sentence when the above-mentioned remark was addressed to him.

"That's my experience," repeated Mr. Beanpoddy. He lifted a glass of Tokay, squaring his lips outward as it touched them and then inward as he withdrew it, and pressing the corners of his mouth delicately with his napkin.

"Everything's a trap more or less," said Dering, pulling himself together, and answering rather at random.

"Ah! so you admit it?" replied the other, smiling. "Now, I hope, my dear fellow, that you don't consider all this tirade officious. The milk of human kindness tinged with officiousness always reminds me of the real fluid tinged with wild onion. It is doubtless just as real and genuine an article, but certainly it is very unpalatable."

"How could I think you officious, Mr. Beanpoddy?" asked Dering, with some of the petulance of a child who is awakened in a strong light.

Mr. Beanpoddy's brilliancy was bringing tears to his mind's eye, and he could not ponder on his absent lady in a glare which disclosed the very molecules that compose thought, as particles of dust are disclosed by a sunbeam. "You are only too kind to take the trouble," he added, earnestly. "I appreciate it, I do assure you."

"You are most tremendously in love," replied Mr. Beanpoddy.

He was silent a few moments, rousing himself suddenly.

"See here, my lad," he remarked: "can't you tell me something about her? Is she handsome?" A nod from Dering. "Blonde or dar——" Another nod interrupted him. "Large or——"

"She is very tall," said Dering, Then he turned desperately and faced Mr. Beanpoddy point-blank. "I do love her with every inch of me," he said. "It will seem absurd to you, of course, but I felt a sneak until I had said it."

He hesitated, rather expecting that Mr. Beanpoddy would contradict that statement concerning the absurdity of his (Dering's) condition of mind; but he did not. He played with a long light-coloured cigar in his well-kept, very handsome hands, on which the veins were beginning to appear in a species of bas-relief, and merely raised one of his eyebrows slightly.

"Such statements don't sound as incredible to old chaps like myself as you youngsters imagine," he said, finally: "only it is like

having lost an arm—the sensation of hand and fingers remains with us, but we can't grasp anything with them."

To this Dering made no reply. It struck him as a profoundly sad remark, and yet he did not wish to take it too seriously, Mr. Beanpoddy having a habit like that of an April sun, of smiling suddenly on gloom which he had evoked. He here solved the difficulty by answering himself.

"It is better to have one arm at twenty than all the fifty of Briareus at fourscore," he remarked, with terse conviction; then added, with his delightful smile, which was bracketed between two curving dimples, "If I had that number of hands, my dear boy, you may be sure they would be held out to you, each with a separate blessing for you and your sweetheart." His smile here became less genial, and more condensed, as it were, having a quizzical compression that elongated the dimples.

"All this is even more generous than it seems," he said, moving his wineglass about, so that its gold flecks of light fell upon an old hoop-ring of small diamonds set in iron, which he wore on his right hand.

"I don't see how it could be," replied Dering, warmly. "My tongue ties itself into knots whenever I really want to express myself."

"I had designs on you," interrupted Mr. Beanpoddy. "I thought it would be very pleasant to have you for a great nephew."

Dering once more coloured furiously.

"It is I who should blush, my dear boy; but then I don't know. Providence is considered a great and successful match-maker, eh? Well, you must ask me to your wedding. I wish I could attend in the office of miracle-worker, and turn the waters of Existence into wine for you. However, Love is the god who is supposed to do that, although it's generally the wine that is watered on such occasions nowadays. One decants one's whole allotted life-portion of Perrier-Jouet on that momentous morning, and the remainder is apt to become flat, or else our Hebes trip in serving it."

"But if one doesn't decant it all?" suggested Dering, shyly.

"Then the air gets compressed, and the bottles fly to pieces in one's hands," replied Mr. Beanpoddy at once. "No, no, my dear fellow, we cannot drink our wine and have it too, as runs the saying in regard to the historical doughnut. If we can merely quench thirst with what is left, we should be grateful."

"I think I'd rather famish," said Dering, curtly.

"You think so now. You don't happen to be thirsty. Passion

is like the spiced feasts which used to be given by the Inquisition to certain unfortunates who were doomed to be famished. I don't fancy such individuals would have been very particular as to the excellence of any liquor which might have been offered them. Ah, my dear boy, there comes for us all a time when we echo the sentiments of the philosopher who said, 'There's no such thing as bad whisky. Some's better than others, but it's all good.'"

Dering had a dim idea that Mr. Beanpoddy was walking upon water somewhat beyond his own depth, but which upbore him in obedience to a certain mysterious power which he wielded. He had recourse to a blunt mention of facts.

"Whisky doesn't get flat when it's decanted," he said. "We were talking of champagne."

"Ah! that's just it," was the bland rejoinder. "One would rather drink unpleasantly fiery whisky than unpleasantly flat champagne."

Dering was beginning to feel irritated. "I think I'd rather take my chances with the compressed air," he said, pushing out his under lip with a slightly obstinate look.

"I have known many who preferred to," replied Mr. Beanpoddy; "but when a fragment of the glass of those figurative bottles flies in one's mind's eye it affects one exactly as the bit of glass which flew into the eye of the little girl in Andersen's story of the Snow Queen. It froze her heart, you remember."

"Yes; but, if you recall the rest of the story, her sweetheart thawed it out."

Mr. Beanpoddy rose, and answered between the puffs with which he lighted a fresh cigar from the stump of the other,—

"Assuredly, my dear fellow; but if you will go a little further, you will remember, also, that that feat was accomplished before marriage, not after."

XV.

THIS conversation with Mr. Beanpoddy had on Dering an effect irritating rather than depressing. He felt that his love had been patronized, and to a man, especially to a young man, it is infinitely more disagreeable to have his state of mind patronized than to be patronized himself.

Then, too, for the first time during their friendship, Mr. Beanpoddy's brilliancy had seemed insufficient, and when he thought of its radiance as having been turned upon Barbara he felt as though some one had turned an electric light upon a star. The distinguished Bostonian's similes seemed to him far-fetched, and his cynicism somewhat meretricious. A remark here occurred to Dering, which he wondered if he would have strength of mind enough to make to Mr. Beanpoddy when they next met. He fancied himself saying, quietly, "At least, Mr. Beanpoddy, there is one thing in which you do believe—that is, in your unbelief."

For one fact, however, he had to thank that charming pessimist —namely, for the indignantly rebellious mood which he had aroused, and which made The Letter a comparatively easy task. He tore up the stilted first two pages, which he had twice copied, and wrote the following words, in a species of panic lest they should escape him before recorded:—

"——I will not begin this letter. I cannot know how you would have me begin it. I don't even know whether you expect a conventional note now. I do not think you dream of the frightful self-control I have had to exercise over myself during the last two weeks. I am glad you do not know. I can only say, over and over, I love you—I *love* you. Perhaps you will think it your duty to throw this in the fire when you read those words. But for God's sake don't be afraid of my ever forcing my love on you. I have told you, and I mean it, that everything shall be just as you say: I will write every week, or I will stop writing altogether, precisely as you may command. It is horrible here in this great whirl of life. Everything jars on me, or else I am out of tune with everything. I went to the play last night, and one of the actresses reminded me of you: her hair was just that rich, brown-red colour; and I could see your very gesture. Strange to say,

she had some of the tones in your dear voice, so that when I heard them my heart seemed to jump into my mouth like a hot coal. The foot-lights became a yellow blur. I was standing with you in that frozen field; I held you in my arms—in my arms; I felt your heart on me; I felt you—you—*you*. If this hurts you, forgive me. Remember, I do not know much about women, or how to handle them, as it were, and you are the first for whom I have ever had even a passing fancy; that is, in the high sense of the word, of course. God forbid I should pose to you as an Admirable Crichton! Whenever I think of those other disturbing fancies that have starred my life with their little poisonous blossoms, I think of you as a dear gardener, who has cut out a great square of the sod on which they grew, tossed it aside, and, in the bare, torn space which it left, has planted a strong, straight, vigorous young tree—my love for you, dear.

"I am writing this at the Club, sitting here by myself. Some rounders have just rolled down-stairs, after one of them had stuck his head in here and muttered to the rest, 'G—d! Man in that room all *alone!*' I have had a rather hard day of it, and feel worn out, mind and body: so forgive this horrible scrawl. Your answer to this will tell me what to do.

"Yours

"J. D."

When Barbara received this letter, she was seated at a small piano which had lately been placed in her room, playing that richly sombre second movement of Chopin's Thirteenth Nocturne. Martha Ellen placed the envelope before her on the music-rack, and it fell down between her hands, making a slight discord. She withdrew her fingers from the chords which had been the delight of her husband, and opened Dering's letter; then, having half drawn the closely-written sheets from the envelope, thrust them back, held them for a moment between her open palms, and went over in front of the wood fire.

Her heart was beating heavily, and when she again withdrew the stiff leaves they rattled against each other in her eager grasp. Once more she put them away from her, then with a quick movement turned to the signature. A certain shade, delicate but distinct, passed over her face, and she pressed her under lip outward and then close above her upper, in a gesture expressive of conviction slightly tinged with disappointment. A few moments afterwards she read the whole letter.

Its effect upon her was contradictory, and consisted of a series of varying shocks rather than of any positive impression. Its opening went to her heart: she felt her throat swell as she read it. This sentence rather chilled her, however: "I will write every week, or I will stop writing altogether, as you may command."

"He doesn't love me; he doesn't love me," she said, addressing the fire, and with a repetition of that unpleasantly convinced movement of her under lip. Again she read on, only to receive a still greater jar a few sentences further. An actress had reminded him of her!—a painted thing, with a sing-song voice and —— Ah! but here: the voice also resembled hers; the hair—"just that rich, brown-red colour." She put the letter down on the white fur rug beside her, and buried her face in the seat of a chair near by. If a woman has handsome hair, she likes to think that its tint has never been precisely reproduced in the locks of any other woman, especially in those of a "leading lady," who probably wears an auburn wig!

What followed proved a slight compensation, however. The fact of the foot-lights having become a "yellow blur" was sufficient evidence that he had been thinking intensely of her, even while noting these points of resemblance in that red-haired person on the stage. And when he said that he held her in his arms—in his arms—and felt her heart on him, and felt her—her—*her*—the boyish iterance and vehemence of it thrilled and startled her.

She found herself smiling, her breath coming quickly. She lifted the paper nearer to her face.

Then came that charming, dainty bit of allegory in which he likened her to a dear gardener, and his love for her to a vigorous young tree.

Again she put down the letter and hid her face. She took it up again, touched, softened, delighted, only to receive a third jolt, as it were, against the brusque and hurried sentences with which it closed. She could see those rollicking dudes lurching downstairs, and hear the drunken tones of amaze in which one of them had exclaimed, "G—d! Man in that room all *alone!*"

Poor Barbara, who was thoroughly morbid, overstrained, and over-excited, kneeled up, took the great chair into her embrace, and broke into a passion of sobs. They did not last very long, and ended in a fit of laughter, which was rather mirthless, although not at all hysterical. This in turn was replaced by a deep frown.

She got to her feet, leaving the letter upon the rug, and walked

up and down the large room, striking her hands lightly together, now behind her, now in front of her. She stopped mechanically after a while, and took her Bible from a low table, opening it at random in that fashion which had become second nature to her. The verse upon which she put her finger ran as follows: "And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them." She turned hastily to another place: "An end is come: the end is come. It watches for thee: behold, it is come." The Bible slipped from her loosened hold upon the floor, and she sank to her knees beside it, pressing her joined hands into her lap and looking at the open book in front of her.

"It watches for me," she said, whisperingly. "An end is come: it watches for me—it watches. He watches me; he looks at me. He smiles to himself. I wonder if I'm going crazy? I seem to be watching myself from some high place; I seem to be outside of myself; I am as apart from myself as my gown is. Oh! if I had only one soul to speak to, to help me!—no, not to help me—only to be sorry with me!" She turned, still on her knees, and reached for Dering's prayer-book, opening it at this verse: "Mine eyes long sore for thy word, saying, Oh, when wilt Thou comfort me?"

"That is it! that is it!" she cried, trembling. "'When wilt thou comfort me?' I cannot bear it! I cannot! I cannot! But I must. What can I do? I can't get away from it—from myself—from the memories—— Oh, the memories! This place is haunted. I will go away. No: what am I saying?—I came here for that; I came here to be haunted. Oh, Val, help me! help me! My God, give him back to me! give him back to me! give him back to me! I will pay for it. Oh, it was cruel—it seemed cruel! We tried to be good; we tried to help others, and to be unselfish, and to think of your will in everything—— I must be crazy. I will go out; I will go out into the air."

As she walked along the red roads, which were lightly powdered with snow, she found an idea grow in her mind until it had become a resolve, and twenty minutes later she knocked at the door of a small frame cottage which bore the sonorous title of "The Rectory." A child opened it for her—a pretty thing in a brown woollen frock and white pinafore, who looked up at the tall, black-draped figure through her light-brown curls, which she pulled over her face with one hand.

"May I came in? Is Mr. Trehune at home?" said Barbara.

The child sidled about, swinging the door from side to side, and muttered something indistinctly.

"It's very cold," pursued Barbara, with her smile. "Mayn't I come into the hall?"

"Yes!" burst forth the child, as though a small fire-cracker had exploded in her mouth.

Barbara stepped inside, out of reach of the bitter wind, and just as she did so Mr. Trehune himself came to the door of his study.

"Nell, you rogue——" he began, stopping short at sight of Barbara.

"Oh! may I speak to you a few moments, Mr. Trehune?" she said, moving forward. "I'm Barbara Pomfret. I am very unhappy. I thought you might say something to me."

Trehune, who was a young man, blushed frantically, the colour showing even through his light hair, which was cropped so close as to be of a silver tone.

He was tall and well put up, and had a broad, squarely-cut face, in which the mouth was the best feature, although his eyes, of a dark blue, were fine in spite of the lashes being silvery like his hair and brows. He made an awkward bow which suggested the presence of a rusty hinge in the small of his back, and opened the door of his study. On the rug before the fire were three more children, each one younger than the little girl who had opened the door. All wore brown woollen frocks and white pinafores, and, as their father re-entered, began a clamour like that of a nest of birds about to be fed. This ceased abruptly as they caught sight of Barbara.

"I'm afraid I'm interrupting you," she said, nervously.

"Oh, not the least—not the least," he assured her; and catching up the children, one on his shoulders, one under each arm, with Nell following, he went out by another door.

XVI.

WHEN he came back he found his unexpected visitor walking up and down his little room. She turned and came instantly towards him.

"Don't be afraid, please," she said, with a smile which he thought strange: "I cry very seldom, and never before people; but something told me you could help me."

"I will try my best," he said, seriously, and they sat down on opposite sides of a small table which was covered with a red-and-white damask cloth. Barbara stretched out her arms upon it, and rested one hand on the back of the other, interlacing the fingers.

"I am so unhappy!" she said, again. "Perhaps 'tortured' is a better word. Yes—I am tortured. May I say things to you just as they come in my mind?"

"Indeed you may," said Trehune, gently. If he had not known who she was, he would certainly have thought her unbalanced, to say the least.

"Then tell me, do you expect to meet your wife in heaven? Do you think she will know you? Do you think she knows about you now? Do you—think—she—watches you?"

Poor Trehune had turned terribly pale, and sat staring at Barbara as though she had plunged a knife into him and was amusing herself by twisting it about. Dering had entertained a similar thought of her on one occasion.

"Do you? Do you?" said Barbara. "Do you think she loves you now? Or, if she loves you, do you think it is just as a spirit might—just as a guardian angel might? Do you think she would care if—if you were to love some one else?"

He opened his lips to reply, but no sound escaped them.

"Do you think she would care, as a living woman would care, if you were to marry again? Do you think God would let her know? Do you think it would be a sin? Do you think it would be a sin? Do you think it would hurt her? Do you think she would have a—a contempt for you?"

He let his arms drop heavily on the table, and, putting his headdown on them, grasped at his short hair with both hands.

"I have hurt you," said Barbara, stupefiedly. "I came to you because I was hurt, and I have only hurt you. I am so sorry! Let me go. I only torture people: they cannot help me."

"No, don't go," Trehune managed to gasp. He got up and went to the window, where he remained for some moments. Barbara sat moveless, staring down at her locked hands, which still rested on the table before her.

He returned presently, and resumed his seat, the only sign of emotion being a slight twitching of his deeply-curved upper lip.

"I—I—think I can answer you now," he said, in a low voice. "Will you ask me your questions once more?"

"No, no," replied Barbara. "I was desperate. I did not see how selfish it all was. You must forgive me. Please forgive me. I don't think I am quite myself. I don't think I would have hurt you so if I had been quite myself."

"I understand; I understand perfectly," said Trehune. "I will do anything in my power for you. You asked me if—I thought—I should—meet—my wife in heaven?"

"Yes," said Barbara. She leaned towards him, ceasing to breathe, and with eyes that devoured his face.

His answer came at once, concise, distinct, assured.

"I do believe that," he replied.

"You—you mean you think you will recognize her?"

"Yes."

"As your wife?"

"Yes."

"As your *wife*?"

"Yes."

"And she will recognize you, of course?"

"Of course."

"But suppose you live to be an old, old man?"

"That is with God."

"Do you think you will love each other as you did on earth?"

"More."

"No, but do you think you will love each other *as* you did then?"

"No—but more."

"More? More?" she said, impatiently. "Wasn't it enough? What could you want more?"

"Nothing!" he cried, with sudden passion, starting to his feet; then the dull look came back upon his face, and he dropped listlessly into his chair.

"I wish I knew how to talk to you," he said, almost piteously.

"But do you think she watches you? Do you think that?" pursued Barbara.

"I think she is near me very often," he answered, softly.

Barbara cast a hurried glance over her shoulder. "And you think you can wound her, can pain her, by your actions?"

"I think it likely," he said, with some doubt. "But I don't know. God may keep all such bitterness from those He has taken to Himself. I try never to do what I think would have wounded her."

"Ah, that is it! that is it!" cried Barbara. "Then you are sure—you are *sure* that you will see her again?—her hair her eyes, her smile, herself?—all again, just as she was, just as you remember her, just as she was when she was your wife? She will have the same ways, the same gestures of head and hand? She will speak in the same voice? You will touch her; you will feel her; she will be your own again; you will take her in your arms; she will love you; you will have her?——" She broke off, suffocated with her rapid breathing.

Poor Trehune was staring in front of him, his face ghastly pale, his forehead drenched with perspiration. It was like being dragged backwards through a hell which he had once traversed.

"Oh," exclaimed Barbara, in a heart-broken voice, "I am making you suffer too much! I will go. Indeed you had better let me go."

"I don't mind suffering if I can help you," he stammered. "What is it that troubles you most? Do you doubt all these things that you have been asking me?"

Her answer stupefied him.

"I—almost—want to," she said, in a low voice, keeping her eyes on him. "Is that a sin?"

"You *want* to?" said Trehune.

"I don't know. Sometimes I think I do. I don't know.

Don't you think it is far, far worse for a woman to marry a second time than for a man?"

"So much depends," began the poor young fellow, helplessly. "There is no sin in either case——"

"But we could never be sure that they wouldn't feel a contempt for us: could we?"

"That doesn't seem natural to me."

"What doesn't?"

"That any one whom we have loved, and who is in heaven, at peace, at rest, could feel scorn for those on earth who love them."

"Ah, yes—for those who love them; yes. But if one stops loving them—if one loves some one else better: what then? And afterwards—suppose—oh," she panted on, with whitening face, "suppose the other died too—before you did—and went there, and they—they discussed you—talked you over to each other: what then? Could you stand that? Could any one stand that without going mad? Mr. Trehune, do you think I can be going mad? I have such terrible thoughts."

"I think you are very morbid," he said, seriously. "And you look feverish. Are you sure you are well? Was it not imprudent in you to come out in this bitter wind?"

"My head was burning so," she answered, "I felt as if the cold would help me. And then I could not seem to breathe in the house: there seemed something watching, watching all the time. Oh, I am so unhappy!—I am so unhappy!"

"I wish to God I could help you," he said. "Is there no way? Can't you tell me something of what is troubling you?"

"I thought I could," she whispered, "but I can't—I can't. I will have to go. I have distressed you enough. But you don't think they would scorn us, then?"

"No, indeed I do not."

"You are sure? You are utterly sure?"

"Absolutely sure."

"And you think that perhaps God will not let our actions pain them?"

"I think it most likely."

"And you really think that they would not have contempt for us?"

Trehune lifted his eyes and looked full at her for the first time.

"We might have it for ourselves," he said, slowly.

She began to shiver from head to foot. Her teeth chattered, so that she could scarcely speak.

"Then you think it is wrong to marry again?"

"It would be wrong for me. I do not say that it would be wrong for you."

"Why do you think it would be wrong for you?"

Again the passion in him broke forth:

"Because I would be a cowardly hound to marry another woman with my heart in the grave of one who has been all to me that earth can ever be. That is why!"

She laid her face against her outstretched arm and was silent for some moments. Finally she said, in a weak voice—

"You think it is impossible that you should ever love again?"

"I am sure of it," he replied, almost with violence.

"I was sure of it—once," she said gently.

There came another silence, which she again broke:

"Are you never lonely? Do you never yearn for a closer human love and sympathy than you have now?" she asked him.

"Yes, but I glory in thinking that what I am enduring is all for her sake, and that some day we will smile over it together."

"You are very, very certain," said Barbara, wistfully. "It all seems so far—so desolately cold and far—to me. It is like trying to warm one's hands at a star. And then you have your children—her children. They must be like her in one way or another. They speak to you with her voice; they look at you with her eyes. I never had a child, you know. Look: if you were to meet another woman just like her in every way, in every line of form and face, in every gesture, in every trick of voice and smile—a woman who was even lovelier than she had been—would you love her?"

"That is impossible," replied Trehune.

"Never say anything is impossible," said Barbara, sharply—"you who believe in heaven and the meeting of wives and husbands. No, forgive me: I am in such pain—I am so unhappy. Then you prefer to lead a life of absolute loneliness and heart-hunger to defrauding her of even one thought?"

"Yes," said Trehune.

"Then you are a wonderful man," she said, in a tired voice. "I believe you; but it is wonderful—it is wonderful."

She stood up, drawing further on her long gloves, and taking her muff from the table.

"You have much to forgive me," she said, "and I have much

thank you for. I do thank you with all my heart. If you would send the little one called Nell over to Rosemary sometimes, it would be very good of you. I have a doll's house that belonged to me as a little girl, and I understand children ; I never bore them. You know I think grown people bore children far oftener than children bore them : don't you ?"

"I will bring her to-morrow," answered Trehune, "if you will let me come to inquire how you are. Won't you let me walk home with you ?"

"No, no, thank you very much. I would rather be alone. Do you think Nell would kiss me if you brought her in here ? No, never mind : I look so tall and big in all this black, I might frighten her, I will wait until I have the doll's house as a background. Good-night. You have been so good to me. I will not forget—ever."

She stepped out into the late and bitter afternoon, and he saw her long black veil borne out on the high wind, like a sombre pennon, as she walked across the frozen fields.

XVII.

IT was on the evening of her interview with Trehune that Barbara wrote Dering the following letter:

"Do not think that I write to you in coldness. Do not think that you have all the suffering. I tell you I have sounded the blackest depths of the waters of Marah, and my feet have sunk into the mud at their bottom. I do not seem able to feel. I do not suffer while I write: I only know that I have suffered. I hope I may always have this stone in my breast instead of a heart. I am cowed utterly. I shrink from grief with every fibre of soul and body. I shrink from giving it to any one else; but I must—I must! Oh, my dear, you will see that I am right, that this is the only way it all could end. You could not respect me; I could not respect myself; I would be always haunted by the feeling that you had a secret contempt for me. And you would have—you would have. After the first freshness of it all was over, you would begin to think, 'If I die, I wonder who this woman will marry?' You would look at your friends and think, 'Perhaps he will be her husband some day,' or, 'Perhaps that other one.' We could not look forward to meeting after death. Why, think of the mockery of it! the hideous, hideous horror of it! Heaven, did I say? Could there be a more absolute hell? It is my idea of hell. My dear, my *dear*, it is better that you should try to forget me. Or no! I cannot say that; I cannot honestly wish it. Oh, God! yesterday I was afraid I was going mad, to-day I almost wish that I were. Oh, how unnecessarily cruel all this seems! I try so hard to be good, and to see a reason for it, but I cannot—I cannot! I can only crouch, and cry, with poor David, 'All Thy billows and waves have gone over me.' And yet it seems even worse than that. Sometimes it comes over me like an awful earth-wave, crushing, stifling, with no crisp coolness as of water, which refreshes even while it drowns. The colour and warmth are gone from life for me; only the beauty of form remains, as in the cold naked grace of a statue. You will thank me for this some day; and when that

day comes—oh, God!—I will pray for death even more frantically than I do now. If I could only make you understand! If I could only bring you to some comprehension of what I am enduring! Dear, be good to me—be gentle. You must go out of my life—you *must!* It would bring you only sorrow. I know how morbid all this will seem to you; I know how you will try to convince me. But do not try; only help me; only be good to me. Oh, if you only knew what I suffer! Dear, I pray God to be always with you—to love you—to keep you; and I pray Him to teach you to understand and feel grateful to

"BARBARA."

This letter, which had been misplaced by his man, was handed to Dering as he was getting into a cab on his way to look in at a bachelor dinner given by one of his friends. He put it in his breast unopened, smiling at this piece of sentiment, but pleased nevertheless every time that the stiff paper made itself felt against his flesh.

As it was three o'clock P.M. when he entered on the scene of the feast, he was not unprepared for the reception which greeted him, and bore with equanimity the process of being tripped up and sat upon by three hilarious "dudes," who afterwards stood him upon a silver tray and marched solemnly around the room, singing snatches from "Harrigan and Hart's" last masterpiece. Dering, who was jolly and absolutely good-tempered through it all, had a strange feeling that Barbara's letter was being desecrated, and made his escape as soon as possible, after assisting at a bombardment of a picture of Washington with jam tarts. He was a little astonished, on thinking it over during the drive back to his club, that the whole performance had bored him rather. He had awakened suddenly, like a man from a rapturous dream which had overtaken him on some humming summer noon while perusing the last masterpiece in the way of witty French romance—had awakened drowsy, still thrilling from those vague yet blood-quickening experiences, to take up the dropped thread of his story, and, behold! Atropos or some as clever shear-clacker had snipped the twist! The dream had spoiled the reality. The bitten place in the forbidden fruit had become brown, leathery, unpalatable. Wasps were nibbling it, an ant or two scuttled over its sleek skin. In his dream the fruit was gold as his love's hair, and sweet as honey through and through. What he took into his mouth grew again as fair, as luscious in its accustomed place, before he had

swallowed the first morsel. There were flowers and fruit on the same branch,—Spring and Summer akiss in the same season,—desire and fulfilment ever smiling into each other's untired eyes, their right hands clasped, the other two free among the leaves of that wonderful tree which grows in the blessed garden and which is called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But we must drink down the sword-flame of the angel who guards it, to enter and eat of its fruit, so being born again; having died of fire, and from fire having sprung again.

By the time that he reached the club, Dering had persuaded himself that the letter against his heart contained a summons from Barbara to return at once to Virginia. He then opened and read it. When he had taken in the last word, "Barbara," he went and deliberately lighted two or three extra gas-burners, and in this blaze of light sat down to think. An ugly, snarling expression came over his face, a sort of grin of savage distaste and pain, and he began to catch his breath nervously with a hoarse sound that was neither sobbing nor laughter, but akin to both. He sat there, without moving, for some two hours, then deliberately undressed, got into a cold bath, and went to bed. In three minutes he was sleeping heavily, from sheer exhaustion, his face, haggard with pain, turned full to the glare of the lighted burners.

The next day Barbara received this telegram:

"Letter received. Will answer it in a few days. Hope you are better.

"J. D."

And it was on the day after that she read in the *Herald* the following notice:

"A most serious and possibly fatal accident occurred to-day on Broadway. A portion of some scaffolding fell upon the head and shoulders of Mr. John Dering, bruising and cutting him severely, He was at once taken to his club, having no residence in town, but is reported dangerously ill, and his mother, who is now at Cannes for her health, has been cabled for."

Barbara rang at once for Rameses.

"I want a man to go immediately with this telegram," she said, in a clear, slightly loud voice, signing the wire as she spoke. It ran to this effect:

"Shall I come to you? Can leave this afternoon's train.

"B."

After some agonizing hours of suspense, she received this answer:

"It was my cousin who was hurt. Fortunately, got your telegram while I was there. Thanks so much. I write at once.

"J. D."

"Wait!" cried Barbara to Rameses, who was leaving the room "This must go too. Send some one else. They must go now—this moment—before it gets too dark."

She snatched up a bit of paper, and wrote, with scrawling eagerness,—

"Then come to me!" (No signature.)

She sat down to the piano and played a wild, whirling waltz of Chopin, stopping now and then to laugh hysterically with her cheek against her hands on the music-rack. She paced the room, singing snatches of frenzied Polish folk-songs. Her colour rose, and her heavy hair, loosening from its ridgy coil, swung far below her waist. She smiled looking down as the hair-pins fell on the carpet in her swaying walk.

"They say one's sweetheart thinks of one when one's hair-pins fall out," she said aloud.

Suddenly she paused, and stood still in the centre of the great room. Only her glittering eyes laughed from her grave face Then her lids dropped; she seemed to grow into marble, as Galatea grew from marble into flesh.

After a while she rang the bell again for Rameses: "I wish my things taken out of this room—everything. You can put them in the little room over the west wing, where I used to stay, years ago. Begin now."

When this devastation was complete, and not even her dressing-gown remained to give an air of individuality to the little brass bed, she turned and sent that long, slow gaze about her which she had bestowed on the room and its contents during the evening of her arrival.

She shivered, holding a shoulder in either hand and pressing her crossed arms closely to her.

"It looks like a corpse that—has—been—robbed," she said, whisperingly, and pausing between each word. "It looks horrible! It looks horrible—horrible!"

She then went out into the hall, and returned with the same mass of white satin and tulle beside which she had watched on that bitter night, not long ago, closing and locking the door after her. The day had been spring-like, and there had been no fire lighted in the large fireplace, but she seemed to be suddenly chilly, for she went and kneeled down upon the hearth, taking some splinters of dry wood which lay in a wicker basket near by, and placing them as though for kindling. As she did this, she glanced restlessly over her shoulder once or twice, then rose, and, lifting the mass of drapery, laid it upon the blazing bits of wood. It caught smoulderingly in one or two places, scorched and shrivelled but died out in those clustering sparks which children delight to call "people going into church." Then, stooping forward, she blew upon it after the manner of Rameses; but this produced no effect, beyond making her eyes smart with the smoke-puffs which rushed out into her face. She became excited, nervous, pouring a box of matches out into the dimly-gleaming folds and throwing a lighted match among them. Still they only smouldered dully; whereupon she began to look eagerly around for paper of any kind.

Every available scrap was thrust into the fireplace, and the fresh bits of light-wood which she began to place here and there burned cheerily. Still the thick satin only curled and shrivelled like a thing in pain.

Barbara pulled open the doors of her desk, and seized upon any inflammable thing which came to hand; and it was at this moment that her eye fell upon a large, brass-bound box of oak which stood far under the low table. She dragged it out, panting in her excitement and suspense. It was full of letters, yellowish in tone, and addressed in faded brown ink, and as she looked at them a strange expression came into her face—an expression of grief, of fright, of resolve.

She took a great mass of them in her arms and approached the fire, afterwards tearing them from their envelopes and crumpling them so that they would ignite more quickly.

"All at once—all at once!" she kept whispering to herself, with the insistent iterance of a person in delirium. She went back and

forth to the heavy box seven or eight times. There was a great blaze now in the throat of the wide chimney; the light tulle whizzed in flakes of fire up its black maw, and the satin began to flame in places and to rise and fall with the heat, as though panting with a weird life.

"All at once—all at once—everything—everything!" whispered Barbara, as though to encourage it. She kneeled and looked on with distended eyes, pushing every now and then another letter among the writhing folds. Lastly she took the miniature which she always wore from her throat, and laid it face down upon the mass.

"Good-bye," she said, in a clear voice, moving backward to the door, but keeping her eyes upon that strangely-warmed hearthstone.

"Good-bye—good-bye—good-bye," she kept repeating, in an expressionless tone. She unlocked the door, withdrew the key, and, passing out, relocked it on the other side.

XVIII.

DERING'S reply came early the next morning:

"Expect me to-morrow *viâ* Charlottesville." (No signature.)

Late in the afternoon Barbara put on her girlhood's walking-dress, and, taking Rameses with her, started off for a walk—or, rather one should say, a run. She flew over the frozen ground, laughing, stumbling, catching her feet in knotted brambles. Poor Martha Ellen, whose hand she grasped, panted along as best she might, also laughing hysterically, the yellowish glow in the west catching the exhausted roll of her white eye-globes.

"I feel like a little girl, Rameses!" said Barbara.

"You sut'n'y kin run like one!" replied Rameses.

"Yes, I can run!—I can run!" gasped her mistress, merrily. "Why do you drag so? Here's the hill where we used to go blackberrying when we were children. We used to wear pink tissue-paper court trains and paint our faces with poke-berries: don't you remember? Tra-la-la! tra-la-la! Keep up—keep up, you monkey! You're dragging me back all the time! Ugh! it's cold! Do you ever wish you were a little girl again, Rămie?"

Poor Rameses was past replying.

A rich purple-blue dusk had sunk down over the land, and the gleam of the frozen ice-pond in a far field shone desolately forth from tangled patches of orange-coloured wild grass. They could hardly see the tone of the dark-red soil beneath their feet.

"Faster! faster! you goblin!" urged Barbara; but Rameses, desperate with fatigue, snatched away her hand, and her mistress dashed on without her.

She came in about half an hour later, flushed, brilliant, to find the small room over the west wing glittering with wax candles, and the curtains, of old green silk splashed with large cabbage-roses, drawn over the narrow windows. Throwing her dog-whip

and gloves on the bed, she went whistling out into the narrow corridor that led to this room, and, with a candle on the floor, searched in some closets which lined the walls on either side. She went back and forth, carrying several armfuls of different fabrics to her room and tossing them on chairs and sofa.

This room was delightful—small, square, with a low ceiling ornamented in white plaster-work, its walls wainscoted in oak within three feet of the ceiling, wherefrom hung old stone engravings, washily tinted, of girls and rabbits, girls and doves, girls and kittens in baskets, girls and young partridges, all dressed in scant white gowns, their unique figures apparently held together with difficulty by tight bands of bright-blue ribbon. A low toilet-table of French gilt, with a large mirror framed in gilt grapes and Cupids, stood between the two windows, and the six candles in the sconces on either side sent clear cross-lights upon the face and form of Barbara, as she stood before it, twisting up the long masses of her hair into a half-curled knot at the back of her fine head.

In twenty minutes Dering would arrive. Her windows overlooked the gravelled carriage-drive, and the first sound of wheels would reach her ears. She selected from the many dresses on the sofa one of rich, peach-bloom coloured Indian silk, a sort of tea-gown, half loose, half tight, through whose folds the lines of her full figure appeared and disappeared with every movement. From her fingers she slipped every ring, holding up her long hands, and shaking them about to make them whiter. The wide sleeves fell back, showing her arms, which were smooth as those of a child warm with sleep. She laughed and kissed them, first one, then the other, still shaking her hands lightly above her head.

Then came a sound of wheels. In a moment she was out in the darkness of the narrow corridor. She felt as though the floor rose beneath her feet, and pressed her against the slanting roof. She could scarcely breathe, and the air seemed stifling. In a sort of panic she reached the great hall, and shrunk down shivering in a corner of the stairway, where she could hear Dering's voice in the hall, the greetings and exclamations of Miss Fridiswig, and whimpering of the greyhounds. She waited there until she heard him close the door of his room, when she rose and half-way descended the stairs, rushing back again to her coigne of vantage as she heard some one approaching. The two greyhounds found

her out, and crouched down beside her, licking at her handsome bare throat and ringless hands, while the sleet rattled intermittently against the small panes in a narrow window just over her head, and she could hear Dering moving about in his room, which was near the foot of the stairs. Presently she stole down and into a long apartment on the opposite side of the hall. It was hung in yellow silk, and its polished oak floor was strewn with rugs in dull blues and orange tones on a white ground. There were many low lounging-chairs, and divans heaped with differently-coloured cushions, and the light of the wood fire licked the glaze on much very beautiful china. She threw herself into a drift of crimson pillows, and let her hands fall palm to palm between her knees, brooding upon the broken fire, whose lilac flames palpitated over a bed of gold-veined coals.

It was not long before the door opened to admit Dering, who entered, closing it carefully behind him, and approached the fire with palms outstretched.

"You must be nearly frozen," said Barbara, with originality.

"Yes, I am," admitted Dering, also with a strong flavour of the same element.

"Have you had some tea? I ordered some to be arranged for you in the dining-room."

"Yes, thanks. I have had several cups. Miss Fridiswig kindly poured them out for me."

"Is it quite warm enough in here for you?"

"Oh, quite, thanks. It's wonderful how you keep this old house so comfortable."

"Yes, isn't it? But it *is* quite comfortable, I think. One can't say that of many Virginia country houses. Do sit down. You look as though you were just going away.

"I am not, however."

"Then sit down. You make me nervous. It must be dreadfully stormy in New York, isn't it?"

"Very. You know it's snowing now outside."

"Sleeting, isn't it?"

"Both, I think."

Suddenly Dering turned, leaning over the arm of his chair, and resting both hands on the arm of hers. She could see his lips quivering, and the dilation of fiery eyes and nostrils.

"Barbara, you sent for me," he said.

"Yes, I did," she answered, not shrinking, with her eyes full on his.

"What for?" he went on.

"For—this!" she said, in a whisper more stirring than any tone of voice, and, throwing herself on her knees in front of him, held out to him her bare and beautiful arms.

"Hush! Wait," said Dering; "let me think. Don't move; let me think." He drew away from her, breathing brokenly, with an expression of keen pain on his face, and they crouched thus for some moments, gazing at each other like two tigers about to spring.

All at once he stooped forward, and, standing erect, lifted her from her feet upon his breast.

"You love me?—you love me, then, my tigress?"

"I love you."

"You are sure of yourself? You are sure of yourself?"

"Yes, yes."

"No, you are not sure; you cannot be. After that letter—good God!—that damnable letter!—how can *I* be sure, after that letter?"

"But *I* am sure; *I* am sure."

"You are changed, you mean. You may change again. How can I tell? No! I see it is as clearly—— Here! listen, you wild thing!—take your hand from my mouth. Ah, you tigress! —you tigress! No. Here—stop!—listen!—*listen*. You read that thing in the *Herald* about Jack Dering, and you thought at first that it was me, and your pity got the better of—— No! stop, I say! You've got to listen. There, I'm sorry if I hurt you, but you must listen. How beautiful you are!—what hair! what eyes! what lips! But I will speak—do you hear? I am stronger than you; I am your master; I will speak. It was pity——"

"Jock! kiss me!"

"It was pity. You were sorry for that cruel letter. You were——"

"*Jock!* kiss me!"

"You thought you would atone. Oh, I know some few things about women. There, you must keep still until I finish. I want you to understand that I loathe your pity—I abominate it! Is that plain enough? I would rather——"

"*Jock! kiss* me!"

"I would rather go away this moment, and never see you again in this world or the next, than compromise on pity! I tell you I——"

"Kiss me!"

"I would rather——"

"Kiss me!"

"I would rather see you belong to some one else than——"

"Kiss me! Kiss me!"

"Than take one iota less love than I give. I——"

"Ah, kiss me, Jock!"

"I will have my love returned in full—in *full*—do you understand? I am as proud as the devil, and unless you——"

"I love you more than anything I have ever dreamed of—more than anything in earth or heaven—more than anything alive or dead—or *dead!* You understand? Now kiss me!"

He released her pliant waist and lifted her face to him with both hands.

XIX.

AFTER this interview followed a week of delight such as is sometimes granted to two mortals, one of whom obtains a love long fought for, one of whom yields to a love long fought against. Into the winter of their discontent had stolen a mood as warmly exquisite as were the spring-like days which interrupted the actual winter weather, and which inveigled the lilac-buds into swelling forth prematurely, and filled the tops of the horse-chestnuts and peach-trees with fragile, rose-hued blossoms.

Barbara ceased altogether from that morbid habit of analysis which is the curse of our century, and gave herself without questioning into the outstretched arms of her sudden happiness. These nowadays analysts remind me of nothing so much as were a man who hears a bird sing on the branch of a fruit-tree in flower to go out and break away the branch, hoping to get a nearer view of the singer. The bird flies, and the blossoms are never fruit. The man has the fact, the dead, fruitless branch, in his hand, but that which made its beauty, the blossoms scattered, and the sweet-voiced, winged thing, are beyond the reach of his scalpel.

Dering, who had wooed one woman, found that he had won twenty. To-day she was a girl in her teens hanging her head beneath the first kisses of her first lover, to-morrow she was a laughing witch who wanted neither kisses nor lover, only a sympathetic comrade who would appreciate her vagaries, which were sometimes most unexpected, but always charming. One morning she would come to him grave-eyed, subdued, to speak with a certain awe of their future together; the same afternoon she would forbid any allusion save to the present, and in the evening tolerate no mention of either, demanding Othello-like anecdotes over which she would become breathless and excited, kneeling beside him and looking up with eyes gloriously dark. Her variety of beauty bewildered him. Her very colouring, and the shade of her hair appeared to change with each mood and costume, so that one day he seemed affianced to an Eastern houri, languid in rich embroideries among many cushions, and the next followed a modern Atalanta through the brown vistas of her familiar woods. He

never knew whether his caresses would be repulsed or accepted —whether his remarks would be received with tears or with laughter—whether she would comprehend divinely his half-spoken thoughts or wilfully misconstrue his most carefully worded expressions.

Barbara was in a state of the most feverish exhilaration. She scarcely slept. When she was alone she sang or whistled like a boy, to drown the voices which had clamoured within her. When she was particularly sleepless, she read books which Dering had marked, or wrote long notes to him, which Rameses placed on his pillow before he awoke, and which he answered before dressing.

The reaction came, however, although she fought doggedly against it, and would not admit its presence even when it gripped her by the heart-strings. Naturally enough, it was occasioned by a sudden recognizance of the likeness between Dering and her husband. As the just-accepted lover developed into the lover at his ease, gestures, expressions, and habits thrust upon her with pitiless exactitude the memory of her first wooing. All this impressed her with that novelty which is sometimes attendant upon an old fact suddenly mentioned to another person. He had for her the identical love-words to which her virginal heart had thrilled in the days gone; his caresses were the same; his half-laughing, half-serious allusions to himself as a married man—even his kisses, and his tempestuous way of lifting her from her feet upon his breast. And yet he himself—he the man the individual—was absolutely different—more masterful, more imperious, more intolerant of many things. She felt like the assistant in a murder, whose accomplice addressed her always, with ghastly mockery, in the tones and manner of their victim. She could not escape; there was no possible way of egress from this labyrinth into which she had wandered with open eyes, for the clue had dropped from her hands when she raised them to clasp the throat of her new lover.

One morning, as he was romping with the greyhounds upon the lawn, waiting for her to appear, she rushed out towards him, her hair half loose in the soft wind, which smelled of young leaves and the wool of some sheep that were cropping the withered grass under the acacias. Her face was pulsing with colour, her eyes bright and eager as those of a dog that foresees a walk.

"I have such an idea!" she cried, taking his arm into her un-

gloved hands and pressing against his side. "We have never been on a straw-stack together. Let us go. Let us run all the way. There is such a beauty in the mill-field! And it has been dry and warm so long, it will be so nice to slide upon. It is so pretty there; and we can hear the mill-wheel: Aunt Caroline is having some flour ground for brown bread to-day."

They ran, laughing and teasing one another like two children, along the broad red road that curved beyond the back of the house, overhung by great catalpa and black-walnut trees, and hemmed in by an unusually eccentric snake fence. The hills showed a faint green bloom here and there along their sides, and the young apple-trees in the new orchard held out now and then a silvery small leaf. They reached the straw-stack, and began to scramble up, arriving at the top panting and covered with dust and bits of straw. She sank into the arms which he held out for her, and, pressing down the collar of his silk shirt, rested her wordless lips in the hollow at the base of his strong throat.

"I love you—I love you," said each, clinging to the other; and then she settled contentedly down, with her head against his knees, and let one of the greyhound pups curl up between her languid, outstretched arms.

"Suppose Mr. Beanpoddy could see you now!" she said, after some moments of this delicious inertia, "or some of your dude friends! I would like to see the puppies attack their spatts. Do you suppose anything ever smelled quite as nice as a straw-stack?"

"Yes—your hair does. What do you put on it?"

"Soap and water."

"Oh, Barbara! do you want me to believe all this is only due to Pears and your cistern?"

"Indeed, indeed I don't perfume my hair, Jock. I think it's so vulgar. I *hope* it doesn't smell like that!"

"Like what?"

"As though it were all horrid and Lubin's-Extracty."

"That is as original a compound verb as the one Punch's little girl made use of a year ago."

"Oh, yes, I know—the one about Liebig's-Extract-of-Beefing it. Jock, I think it would be so charming to slide down here together."

"Do you? Well——"

They began their descent, first sedately, then in a whirling rush which landed them under an avalanche of loose straw.

"Isn't—it—fun!" she gasped, as they climbed up again.

"Your hair's down. Lord! how long it is! I could tie you to me with it. Look here."

He divided the heavy masses and drew them about his throat, then released her, horrified at the sudden whiteness of her face.

"Barbara! what's the matter?"

"Nothing—I—nothing—nothing at all."

"That's absolute nonsense, my dear. You know you really can't put me off in that absurd way. Barbara——" He paused, a sudden look of intelligence creeping over his face. "See here, Barbara: I've thought something once or twice. Are you trying to fancy that I'm Valentine Pomfret?"

At this she turned on him a look so full of reproach, anguish, and entreaty that he was frozen with a sense of his brutality.

"Barbara, forgive me!" he said, reaching out for her; but she held him away, with her open hand.

"It was so cruel!" she managed to whisper at last, with chattering teeth.

"My God! I know it was! Can you forgive me?"

She withdrew her hand, and began pressing it with short convulsive movements upon the other.

"Can't you forgive me?" said poor Dering.

Still she sat wordless, her handsome throat swelling with some repressed feeling.

"I—I—have tried to think that," she said after a while.

Dering's face changed.

"You have?" he said, in a low voice.

"Yes, but—I—could not. I found—I——" She stopped a moment, and then went on, looking steadily at him, "I found I did not want to."

"Barbara!"

"I did not want to think of you as any one else. I did not want any one else. I wanted you." She paused again, adding, in a whisper, "I want you."

He took her in his arms, and she felt the great throbs of his heart against her face.

"I want you!—I want you!" she went on, incoherently—"forever—forever—forever! Only you! Oh, Jock, if you—if you die, you know I will be true to *you?* Hush! don't answer. How can you know? My God! how can you know?"

"I do know," said Dering, stoutly, braced by the belief which sustains every lover—the belief that the woman who loves him loves him more, and better, and differently from

the way in which she has ever loved or ever will love any man again.

"I do know, my darling," he repeated; but she sobbed on, clinging to him: "No, no! you cannot! you cannot! And I—I can never prove it to you!"

"I would not have a proof. I do not want one. I would not accept it if you could give it to me. I wish I could make you understand how thoroughly I comprehend all your struggles and feelings. But you mnst not think that you only suffer."

"It is because I grieve you that I suffer," she replied, still hiding her face. "All the little pleasure that I have given you cannot pay for the pain. You think I don't know that; but, oh, I do!—I do!"

"You only give me pain when you speak in this way," said Dering, caressing her bowed head. "You only give me pain when you think that you are anything but a joy, a blessing to me—the very light of my life. I not only love you, I actually adore you! Why, I swore once that, no matter what a woman was to me, I would never kiss her feet; and look here! and here!" And, before she could prevent him, he had stooped and pressed his lips, now on one foot, now on the other: then, kneeling up, he kissed her dress, her knees, her waist, her arms, while she bent over him, panting, intoxicated, half re-assured.

It was in some such way that nearly all their misunderstandings ended.

XX.

IT was quite late on an afternoon of the next week that a sudden heavy shower overtook them while out riding. As they were near the pretty Gothic church of the neighbourhood, they fastened their horses and took shelter within its doors, which they found open. After about twenty minutes of ceaseless downpour, Dering insisted on remounting his horse and riding back to Rosemary for a trap of some kind, and thus Barbara was left to a possible hour of rather dreary waiting. She became tired of her post on an old oak settle near the open doors, and wandered up into the organ-loft. It was grey with cobwebs and littered with melancholy bits of bread soaked in strychnine, which had been left there for the delectation of the rats. She found the organ unlocked, and thought she would see if she could get the sexton to pump for her, so went cautiously down the crooked and dusty stairway, wondering at the sudden darkness which enveloped it, to find the church doors closed. Her heart leaped violently, then settled into heavy beating, and, looking back into the darkening church, she felt with both hands for the fastening. It was secure, and from the outside. Barbara, who had from her childhood entertained an especial horror of being locked into even a bright and daylighted room, felt a cold horror, as strong as it was unreasoning, creep up within her. She ran hurriedly out into the aisle of the church, which was not so gloomy as that little passage near the door, and stood still, with her hand on the back of one of the pews, trying to think what she had best do. It was not long before she remembered that through the vestry-room she might make her escape, and, hurrying forward, found the entrance to it also locked.

The rain was now falling more heavily than ever, and sheets of bluish lightning threw into pale relief the tall windows, with their lead-framed panes of glass, and showed her the large black letters on the three white marble tablets over the altar, but failed to penetrate the arches of the vaulted roof, from which the gloom seemed to hang like dust-clogged cobwebs.

"I will be quite quiet, I will be quite collected," she said to herself. "I will go in my pew and sit down. Perhaps I will fall

asleep, and then Jock will come and laugh at me, and we will have such a gay, cosey drive home together." There were other thoughts which came huddling about her, whimpering for admittance, and which, when refused, threatened with ugly grins and cries of rage. "I will be quite quiet,—quite calm," she repeated, this time aloud. "I will take this prayer-book in my hands and kneel down—and then I will count a hundred; and by that time Jock will come." She kneeled down, resting her forehead on the large, old-fashioned prayer-book, and listening to the gushing of the rain from the sloping roof.

The lightning increased, grew sharper in its darts, and was now followed by low thunder. All at once a noise attracted her—a rattling at the church doors. Starting up, she ran down the long aisle, dragging over a foot-bench in her haste, but undeterred by its echoing crash.

"It's me—it's Barbara, Jock. Open, quick!"

A renewed rattling was her only answer, followed by a long, plaintive whine from the dog outside that was scratching for admittance. This unexpected reply so startled her that she could not repress a broken cry, and rushed back again into the body of the church, involuntarily lifting her hands to her ears as she ran.

A beseeching and heart-broken howl from the lonely dog followed her, its quavering fall absorbed in a ponderous roll of thunder which jarred along under her feet. Then came a heavier rush of rain, and the sound of a wind rousing itself along the sodden leaf-carpet outside. Only the general outlines of the reading-desks and the great tablets were now to be discerned, save in the flickers of lightning which seemed to soak with an unnatural gleam all objects upon which they fell. Again the dog howled, and again the thunder drowned its long note.

"He is nearly here now," said Barbara, who was again seated in her own pew. "He is just driving through Machunk Creek. Now he is coming up the long hill. Now he has turned into the lane. Now he is coming into the church-yard. Now——"

She was here startled by the baffled dog, who leaped up at the window near which she was sitting, hung by its paws on the ledge for a moment, and then dropped whining back upon the ground without. The sight of that dark head and those clutching paws horrified her inexpressibly, and she rushed and crouched down on the altar steps, trembling in every fibre. The next lightning-flare that swept the church fixed the great letters on the white tablets

upon her inner lids, and thrust upon her a memory against which she had been fighting ever since finding herself locked in, and which coursed backward through her veins as though ice-water had been injected into them.

The last time that she had followed the outlines of those sombre characters, she had been standing before this altar as a bride. She could see the whole scene as distinctly as though she were at the very moment playing her part in it—could see the kindly, earnest face of the minister who had married them, even to a wart upon one of his nostrils, and a curious habit he had of drawing his large chin into folds—could see her father's face, with its anxious expression and softly-curling grey hair, through which the morning light shone whitely, and which contrasted so well with his fresh and wind-reddened skin—saw her husband's hand as it held her own (she had not looked at his face during the ceremony)—saw the little rip in one of her lace flounces, where it had caught in the carriage door—heard the voice of the man who had been her husband—a voice rich and earnest and unusual—"I Valentine take thee Barbara to my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part." Ah! she heard more. She felt him lean to her when they had stepped into the carriage and were out of sight and hearing of all others—felt the very breath of his words against her cheek:

"Death will not part us, Barbara. We will laugh in his face my Barbara—my wife—my Barbara—my brave girl. What is Death to Love? It will be only a little lonely waiting for whichever of us goes first. He cannot part us, sweetheart; he cannot part us."

She thought she heard his voice close at her ear:

"Death cannot part us, Barbara."

"Now he is coming through the double gate," she said, aloud. "Now he's driving very fast over that good bit of road. Now he's turning into the Greyson's field. Now he is coming up the church hill. Now he is turning in at the gate."

The dog under the window howled again, and again the voice at her ear seemed to say, as though to cheer her,—

"Death cannot part us, Barbara."

She kneeled up, grasping the altar rail with both hands, and making a tremendous effort at self-control. "Dear God, please take care of me, and bless me, and be good to me," she said, in the childish voice which came to her whenever she was suffering. "I

have not done any one any harm. I have tried to be good. Please ask Val to forgive me. He does not care for me as a wife any longer. Please ask him to think of me kindly. Please make him think of me kindly. Please make him forget about me. Please, if I have done wrong, forgive me. Don't let these thoughts come to me any more, and let Jock come soon. And don't let me have to wait here very long. And please be good to me, and show me how to be good." She was rambling on, comforted by the mere sound of the words which she uttered, but when she paused to take breath she heard more distinctly than ever those words, "Death cannot part us, Barbara."

"Oh, please, Val!—oh, please, Val!" she began, piteously. "Oh, God, don't let him be angry with me—for Christ's sake! Oh, Val, it was so lonely! *I* would forgive *you*. *I* would want *you* to be happy. We will all love each other in heaven, in a different way. It was so lonely—oh, it was so lonely! You don't know how I missed everything: I had to drink my tea all alone, and it was so dreadful in the dark nights; and I thought of you, and thought of you until my heart seemed bursting. You don't know how I longed for you, Val. I used to pray you to come to me—you must have heard me—and you never came until now—until now when it seems so dreadful. I wish you would ask God to let me die. I wish you would try not to hate me, Val. He looked so like you——no, that isn't honest, because afterwards I —— No! no! Don't say it any more, Val! don't say it any more! I will be good. Will you take me back? Oh, Val, Val! I cannot do it! I cannot marry any one else! I'm not such a bad woman as you think! I can't do that. I couldn't help wanting to, but I can help doing it—I can help doing it. If you will only come to me sometimes! It was so lonely! I'm afraid of the dark. I missed you so—I was so lonely—all the time, all the time! I won't marry him, Val. If you'll only forgive me and take me back—no, if you'll only forgive me—I'll do it if you'll only forgive me. Indeed I will! Indeed I will! Please, Val, don't think I really meant to marry him. I never really meant to marry him. I thought I did, but I couldn't have in the bottom of my heart. Oh, I was so wicked even to think of it! But you remember how I felt at first. Oh, I hated myself!—I hated myself! I tried so hard—oh, I did try—I did try. It was because he looked like you at first. He looked so like you, I thought it was you at first; I thought you had come back. I have been so wicked!—so wicked! But I will stop. I will be

good. Please, Val!—please, Val! Please, God, don't let him laugh at me. Oh, Val, don't laugh at me!——"

When Dering at first stooped over her, as she lay, face down, along the altar steps, he thought that she was dead.

XXI.

BARBARA was unconscious for several hours, and when she at last came to her senses her first rational wish was to see Dering. Although it was then midnight, she insisted upon being helped into the room where she had received him on the evening of his arrival, her rich hair hanging down over her dressing-gown of white silk, and straying here and there among the bluish-grey fur with which it was trimmed, like thin veins of fire through curling ashes. Her face was very pale, her eyes dark, wide, with unflickering lids spread above them as though held in place by the slightly-lifted eyebrows. Dering came and knelt gently and dumbly beside her, attempting to lift the loosened hands which lay along her lap. She withdrew them slowly, and clasped them together below her breast.

"Perhaps I worry you," he said, alarmed at the dreadful unvaryingness of her attitude and expression. "Suppose we don't try to talk to-night!"

"We must talk to-night," she said, dully.

"But, dearest, we can say everything just as well to-morrow. Let me help you upstairs."

"There won't be any to-morrow," she answered, still in the same dull voice.

Dering tried again to take her hands. "My poor darling! what an awful shock you must have had!"

"It was very dreadful," she said

"My poor love! I know it was! Won't you give me your

hands, darling? I want to hold them and warm them. You look so cold!"

"Yes, that is it: I am so cold. Wait: you may have one of my hands—the left one. Wait a minute—until I find——" she was groping with tremulous fingers in the breast of her gown. "Here it is," she said, finally, and held out to him her open palm, on which lay a plain gold ring.

"What is it? What is it? What must I do?" said Dering, startled. "What ring is it?"

"I want you to put it on. It is my wedding-ring."

"Barbara! Good God! my dear girl, what do you mean? I'm afraid you are awfully ill. Let me call someone. For God's sake, do, there's a good child!"

She motioned him to come back. "Don't call any one. I am not ill. I know exactly what I am doing. That is my wedding-ring. I took it off. You must put it on again; you must!" she said, with the first note of a rising excitement in her voice.

Dering was very white, and he set his teeth until his ears sang.

"I think you very ill," he answered, at length, in a controlled voice. "I do not know what you mean."

"But I do!" she cried, half rising; "I do! God has told me: He told me in those awful hours in the church—when you did not come to me!—when you did not come to me!"

"I came as soon as I could. It was pitch-dark, and the roads like rivers. Barbara, you break my heart when you speak to me like this!"

She looked at him, relapsing once more into her first stolidity of voice and manner:

"Hearts don't break. That is what you would call a—'a chestnut.'" She did not smile, and continued to look seriously up at him, the ring still lying on her relaxed palm. He had a horrible revulsion of feeling, and felt his mouth beginning to twist into that strangely distorted grin which characterized him in moments of violent emotion. He turned away, pretending to arrange a fold in one of the rugs.

"It strikes me as almost coarse, the use of such an expression at such a time," he said, finally, in rather a hard voice.

"Does it? Does it?" she said, a little curiously. "You know I told you I was coarse once——"

"Barbara!" was all that he could reply.

"I do think I have been honest," she went on. "I told you word for word how I felt about Val—how I could not forget him. I told you how he haunted me. I told you we could never be happy. Women cannot forget, even if they want to—at least, not women like me. I think I must be an awful thing—an unnatural thing. I sometimes wonder if God made me for an experiment: only that couldn't be if He knows everything beforehand, could it? No, please don't stop me; I feel as if I could say it all now, better than I ever could again. I saw everything this evening in the church. I was so frightened! He spoke to me. I know what I must do. I see how wicked I have been. I have been coarse: it is wicked for a woman to be coarse. I don't see how you could have wanted me. I was his—I was his first—I was his wife. I couldn't be your wife too. I couldn't forget. I burned up my wedding-dress and his picture, but something made me keep my ring. I know now what made me keep it. I have been very wicked. I know you will hate me—you look at me so horribly. Somehow I am not afraid: I will never be afraid of anything again; I will never be——"

Dering leaned over, seized her firmly by the wrists, and pulled her to her feet. Her wedding-ring struck sharply on the polished floor between them.

"If you are not mad," he said, slowly, "you are the most unutterably cruel creature I ever imagined." But his words seemed not to impress her. She swayed about in his fierce hold, peering from side to side for the fallen ring.

"I must not lose that! It's all I have," she said. "Won't you let me go, just until I find it?"

He threw her from him with an inarticulate cry, all the more savage for being smothered. He felt at that moment that he did hate her, and the firelight on her long red hair seemed a baleful and odious thing as it glistened and moved, with the lithe curves of her figure, while she crawled about, looking for her lost ring.

"I can't find it!" she said at last, gazing helplessly up at him, and, kneeling back on her heels, with her hands twisted nervously together between her knees. "That's gone too! I haven't anything left! I think God might let me die!"

"Perhaps He thinks you might change your mind after you were dead," suggested Dering, savagely.

But her only answer was to go on groping helplessly about,

murmuring from time to time, "I can't find it! I can't find it! and it's all I have!"

"Barbara," he said, after some moments of silent waiting, "I wish to understand you thoroughly. You wish me to go away? You wish everything to be ended between us?"

"I don't wish anything," she answered, shaking her head with brows drawn piteously upward. "I am only trying to do what is right."

"Do you think it is right to ruin a man's whole life through sheer morbidness?"

"Oh, you don't know how I feel! You can't know how I feel! He said death could not separate us; and it can't! Why, I have been his wife—his *wife!*"

"Don't you suppose I know that?" said Dering, fiercely. "How many times do you suppose that has come to me? Good God! are women human, I wonder?"

"I meant to do right," she faltered, great tears springing to her eyes. "You don't know how dreadful it is to remember that you have been one man's wife, when you are thinking of being another's. I think God has been very cruel to me. Oh, He has! He has!"

"And what do you think He has been to me?" said Dering, grinning; then, with a strong motion of his arm, as though flinging something hampering from him, "No! I'll be d——d if I'll shift it all on Providence! What do you think *you* have been to me?"

"A curse," she whispered, nodding her head sagaciously in a way that struck him as horrible. "Yes, I know I've been a curse to you. But I've never been your wife; and then men forget. You are so young. Just think how dreadful it would have been for me to marry you, and then for you to have found—out—this!"

"Yes, I think it would have been rather unpleasant," he admitted. Great drops stood on his forehead and under his eyes, but his voice and manner were very quiet.

"You see, everything can be worse," she said. "When people used to say that, it sounded so meaningless to me, as if it were cant; but it is so true. If I had married you it would have been ten thousand times worse."

"And yet you said you loved me!" he burst forth, in a sort of rage.

"And I did! I did! You don't think I didn't?" she said, pausing in her re-begun search, with a species of dull surprise. "I did love you."

"Did you, indeed?" said Dering, harshly. "It seems there are some things women can get over, after all. I suppose a man must die and haunt them to be remembered."

"But you do believe I loved you? You do believe that?"

"I did believe it," he said, with rough emphasis.

"But don't you believe it now?" she said, anxiously. "I don't feel anything now, but I know I loved you. Indeed, indeed, I'm not so bad as you think; and I must have loved you, to act as I did; it all proves that I did. I can't help not doing it now; I can't help not being sorry, or glad, or frightened, or anything, now. You know I wrote you once in a letter that I didn't feel anything. But I know I loved you."

"I believe you are crazy," said Dering, in a strangled voice.

"I wish I thought so," she said, plaintively; "but I know I'm not. I'm just stunned now, because I have been on such a terrible strain for so long, but my mind is as clear—as cool. I see everything; I see just how it would all have been; and I see how you are obliged to hate me at first. I would if I were you. You can't help it. I don't feel angry with you because you hate me; it would be unnatural if you did not; and then it will keep it from hurting you so. I would a great deal rather have you hate me than hurt you."

"Would you?" said Dering.

"Yes, I would—I would. You don't believe it, but I would."

"It is hard to believe some things," was his reply. "I think, if you will be good enough to lend me a trap, that I will drive to Charlottesville."

"To-night?" she said, pausing again to look at him.

"Yes, to-night. Perhaps you can understand a feeling that I have against sleeping another night in this house."

"It's because I'm in it," she said, sadly. "I don't blame you. I don't blame you in the least."

"That is very good of you," he remarked, acridly. "Can I hope your generosity will extend to the loan I have just asked for?"

"You are really going to-night?"

"If you will kindly lend me a trap and horse, and some one to to open gates."

"You can order what you wish," she said, slowly.

"Thanks," he replied. "I suppose I may shake your hand?" She held it out to him silently.

"Good-bye," he said; then, after a pause, "good-bye, Barbara.'

"Good-bye," she answered, looking down at their clasped hands.

"Good-bye," he said, once more; once more she answered him, still keeping her eyes on their hands, which now fell apart silently. He went to the door, and passed out, only to re-enter stumblingly, to catch her to him, to bruise her face and throat with short, hard kisses.

"I love you!" he said, in a voice of terrible anguish. "I am a coward; I love you in spite of everything! Oh, Barbara, Barbara, you will be so sorry for this to-morrow, when I am beyond your reach—when you know that I have gone forever! For I won't come back after this; I will never come back. Barbara, think of it all!—think of our beautiful hours together—of my kisses — of the way you have clung to me—of the way you have kissed my hair, my eyes, my throat—as I kiss yours now!"

He almost hurt her in his desperate eagerness, but he might as well have tried to rouse response in a corpse. She lay in his arms panting, but listless, and the eyes that she lifted to him were full of a certain timid pleading, and dwelt upon him through great tears.

"I try to feel sorry, and I only feel sorry because I am not really sorry," she said, tiredly. "I know you are going, and that I loved you, and I try so hard to be sorry; but I can only think how nice it will be to go to bed and go to sleep. I am so tired! I don't think I will ever cry again, except because I can't cry. Oh, it all sounds so silly! but please try to understand."

"Good-bye," he said, hoarsely, just touching her soft hair with strong but trembling fingers. "Give me your lips this once."

She lifted her mouth, but his passionate kiss left her parted lips as piteously expressionless as ever. "I can't do it! I can't feel anything! I try so hard!"

He knelt suddenly at her feet, and lifted her hands to his thick curls.

"Say, 'God be with you, Jock,'" he whispered, stammering.

She said it very sweetly, in a clear, earnest voice, as though anxious to please him; "God be with you, Jock."

"And with you," he said, giving one heavy sob.

He held her for a moment tightly about her knees, then went, closing the door after him with careful softness.

As he left the room, she fell once more to looking for the lost ring, found it at last underneath the fender, and, blowing the ashes from it, slipped it upon her finger as Dering drove from the door.

THE END.

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